

The Jirel Issue

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THE JIRELS OF EASTERN NEPAL: AN INTRODUCTION

H. Sidky
Janardan Subedi

This issue of *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* is dedicated to the Jirel people who inhabit the Jiri Valley in the Dolakha District of the Eastern Nepal (see Map). Jirel culture features many elements that sets it apart from the cultures of other Nepali ethnic groups. They practice a form of Buddhism, which varies significantly from the Buddhist practices of their Sherpa neighbors. The Jirels also worship Hindu gods and celebrate all the Hindu rituals with great enthusiasm. Additionally, each Jirel clan has its own god or goddess, neither Buddhist nor Hindu, and these clans also engage



in ancestral spirit worship. The Jirels practice their own form of shamanism, which is centered on practitioners known as *Phombos*. These healers and spirit masters, who in some ways resemble the Nepali *Jhankris* (cf. Miller 1997), utilize unique rituals in their curing ceremonies. Jirel funeral rites also possess elements that are unique to them. Finally, it might be noted that each clan has various food taboos that again are neither Buddhist nor Hindu in derivation. For these reasons, it is important to

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document in the ethnographic record *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, The Jirel Issue (January 2000), an analysis of Jirel culture.

The Jiri Valley Ethnographic Project was a multidisciplinary cooperative effort involving a biological, cultural, ecological, linguistic anthropologist, as well as a medical sociologist and a political scientist. The research project was designed to record an ethnographic description of the Jirel people that emphasized their socioeconomic and political organization, kinship patterns, life-cycle rituals, language, ethnoenvironment, and indigenous healthcare practices. It also paid special attention to the impact of "modernization" efforts on the Jirel culture.

Previous Research

Although scholars, both foreign and Nepali, have conducted research in Nepal over the last several decades and have greatly expanded our knowledge of the peoples and cultures of the estimated 75 ethnic groups living there, ethnographic literature specifically focused on the Jirels is virtually nonexistent. The first scholarly research among the Jirels was conducted by two American physical anthropologists, Dr. John Blangero and Dr. Sarah Williams-Blangero, of the Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research, San Antonio, Texas, USA. Their main focus was on population genetics. While this work was significant and shed light on some aspects of the Jirel culture, e.g., mating patterns and inter-village migrations, much still remained unknown. Eventually, their studies led them to an interest in the genetics of susceptibility to helminthic infections among the Jirels. In a collaborative effort with Dr. Janardan Subedi, a medical sociologist/anthropologist, from Miami University, USA, they were able to secure grant funding from the National Institute of Health, USA. This funding enabled these researchers to establish the Jiri Helminth Project and Clinic in August of 1995. It has been in operation ever since.

While the main focus of the research has remained on population genetics, Dr. Subedi conducted an extensive survey in which he gathered statistical data on demographics, general health, health care utilization, mental health, and other disabilities among the Jirels. It became obvious that an in-depth understanding of Jirel culture was very desirable. It was at this point that the project reported in this present volume was conceived.

The Present Project

The Jiri Valley Ethnographic Project as conceived as an attempt to collect basic ethnographic information on the under-reported Jirel ethnic group. In order to achieve this end, the project recruited two additional field

research members, Dr. H. Sidky, an ecological anthropologist, with an interest in the anthropology of religion, and Dr. James Hamill, a linguistic and cognitive anthropologist, both affiliated with Miami University. The Philip and Elaina Hampton Fund for Faculty International Initiatives, Miami University and the Continental Trading Social Science Research Award, Kathmandu, Nepal funded their research. After data collection, several other anthropologists and sociologists contributed to the analysis of the information gathered. These included: Dr. Ronald H. Spielbauer, Dr. Sree Subedi, both of Miami University, Dr. Mark Tausig, Dr. James Ross, C. L. Broughton, all of the University of Akron, and Robin Singh of Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

The cultural anthropologists sought to achieve their research goals through the systematic gathering of quantitative and qualitative ethnographical data through standard field methodologies. These included on-site formal and informal interviews, participant observation, as well as the collection of quantitative data on land use, productive technologies, economic output, and labor allocation and organization in various villages. Detailed information on household incomes, the number of wage laborers, changes in agricultural patterns, as well as data on family, lineage, and clan membership were also obtained. Information was also collected on the interrelationships and interactions between descent groups and how these interactions have changed over the last several decades. Finally, ethnosemantic data were collected on certain aspects of the Jirel language.

In summation, the ultimate objectives of this project were threefold: (1) to provide a detailed ethnographic description of traditional Jirel society, essentially a baseline ethnography; (2) to demonstrate how development efforts have transformed this community, which at one time had been a cohesive ethnic group of self-sufficient subsistence farmers; and (3) to assess whether the cost of this transformation outweighed its benefits as far as the Jirels are concerned, and what the positive and negative effects of these changes have been.

Given the main objectives of the project, ethnographic descriptions have been emphasized. Ethnographic data make ethnological or comparative research possible into such areas as poverty, famine, social inequality, political unrest, ethnic cleansing, corruption, terrorism, armed conflict, and environmental deterioration. Without a comparative approach, an understanding of such significant social problems cannot be fully explored. As has been said many times, the significance of social science research, especially anthropology, is its cross-cultural and comparative approach. Such an approach can help in the conceptualization of many of these issues in new ways.

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In addition to the unique characteristics of the Jirel culture, Jirel society exists as an example of an ethnic group, which has been subjugated, oppressed, and exploited by rich and powerful elites who have monopolized economic and political power. In recent times this has occurred under the guise of both "democracy" and "communism." The Jirels are not alone in having been the victims of such phenomena and the same forces have impinged upon and have kept many other Nepali ethnic groups impoverished and in subordinate social and political positions (Shrestha 1997; Subedi 1995). Thus, the study of social change and its impact has received attention in several of the papers found in this volume. The authors have tried to devote considerable attention to the hegemonic forces that are counterproductive to the well being of indigenous peoples, such as the Jirels. These forces have consistently perpetuated social injustice and inequality.

While the papers in this volume present a general overview of certain aspects of the Jirel culture, a broader and much more detailed account of this ethnic group will be provided in a forthcoming monograph.

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SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, ECONOMY AND KINSHIP AMONG THE JIRELS OF EASTERN NEPAL

**H. Sidky, James Hamill, Janardan Subedi
Ronald H. Spielbauer, Robin Singh
J. Blangero, S. Williams-Blangero**

Introduction

The ethnographic literature on the Jirels is extremely sparse. Brief general descriptions may be found in Bista (1980), Fournier (1974, 1978), Valeix et al., (1972), and Williams-Blangero and Blangero (1990). This paper is intended to fill some of the gaps in the ethnographic literature by providing an outline of Jirel ethnogenesis, social organization, and kinship system.

The Jirels inhabit the Jiri-Sikri Valleys, located in the Janakpur Zone of the Dolakha District, in eastern Nepal. Jiri is situated 190 kilometers east of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. With an average elevation of some 2,000 meters, the Jiri area is comprised of several small independent valleys. Two major rivers, the Tama Koshi and Likhu Khola form its borders to the east and west, respectively (Valeix et al. 1972).

The total Jirel population is between 3,500 to 4,000 individuals (Blangero 1987; Williams-Blangero et al., 1998), the majority of whom live in villages nestled on the slopes of the Jiri and Sikri Valleys. These villages include Chetrapa, Jungu, Upper Sikri, Lower Sikri, Kharayoban, Dhunge, Bhandar, Upper Kot, Lower Kot, Ratomate, Gompaling, Yarsa, Raate, Sizel, Renje, Gunsa, Tapka, and Tasite. Several other ethnic groups live in the Jiri area as well, these include the Sherpa, Tamang, Sunwar, along with the Brahman and Chhetri people of the Hindu castes.

Economic organization

The Jirels have a subsistence economy based upon the cultivation of millet, maize, wheat, barley, potatoes, and some rice, which is grown in the lower part of the valley (cf. Metz 1989). Over the past few years or so,

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Jirels have also started to produce leafy vegetables for the markets. Turmeric, ginger, and other spices are cultivated as well for local consumption. The Jirels also maintain goats, cattle, pigs, and buffaloes, and virtually all households keep numerous chickens. A few families raise rabbits, and some manage to keep beehives for honey production.

In the past, many Jirel households kept sheep as well. Sheep wool was used in making coats and rugs. But when the Government of Nepal took direct control of the forests and pastures in 1957, the Jirels were deprived of access to the higher altitudinal ecological zones. These areas had traditionally been used as communal grazing grounds for sheep (cf. Ghimire 1992). The result was that today there are no sheep tended in the Jiri Valley.

Given the limited amounts of arable land available, few families are able to produce enough food to last them the entire year. While some households can provide for their subsistence needs from their farms for about six months out of the year, others manage to produce enough for nine or ten months, depending on the amount of land they own and the number of adult laborers in the family. The majority of Jirel households have to sell chickens and goats in order to supplement the family's income. Many households also produce *raksi*, a distilled alcoholic drink made from fermented millet or corn. This is sold at wholesale prices to non-Jirel shopkeepers who maintain booths at the local bazaars. Individual families produce anywhere from the equivalent of 60 to 600 bottles of *raksi* per year. Some families also supplement their income with wage labor, working in the local clinic and hospital, schools, forestry office, and other governmental posts.

The family is the basic productive unit, to which all members contribute. Jirels exert considerable effort in order to provide food for the family, as well in the performance of other essential tasks, such as gathering firewood and taking care of the livestock.

Ethnogenesis

The origin of the Jirels is lost in antiquity and Jirel oral tradition contains several conflicting accounts concerning their ethnogenesis. One account suggests that the Jirels are descendants of an ancestor who was the offspring of a mating between a Sunwar man and a Sherpa girl, some 8 or 10 generations ago. Quantitative genetic studies appear to confirm this ancestry (Blangero 1987). Additionally, the Jirel's "hybridity" is also thought to be evident in Jirel cultural and linguistic features (Williams-Blangero et al. 1998).

The Jirels speak their own distinct language, called Jirel, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group. Strahm and Maibaum (1971), linguists working in the area have noted certain similarities between Jirel and the Sherpa language, and the Jirels themselves are aware of the similarities. Indeed, one informant noted that numerous Jirel words appear in the Sherpa Tibetan religious book, the *Lama Doma*. In addition to these common linguistic features, the Jirels also share a common religion with the Sherpa, namely Buddhism.

The Jirels' Sunwar heritage is posited on the basis of Hindu ritualism found in Jirel religious practices. Jirel exogamous patrilineal clans are also similar to that of the Sunwars (Williams-Blangero et al. 1989:374). It must be noted, however, that the Sunwars adopted Hinduism and Brahman priests during the Rana period (1846-1950), to Hinduize their Buddhist ritual practices in a status-seeking endeavor (Bista 1980:70). The Jirel's Hindu ritualism, therefore, does not appear to have a Sunwar origin, but rather is explicable in terms of the influence of the Brahman and Chhetri castes, who came to the Jiri region during the military expansion of the Gurkha King Prithvi Narayana Shah in the late 1700s (Fournier 1974).

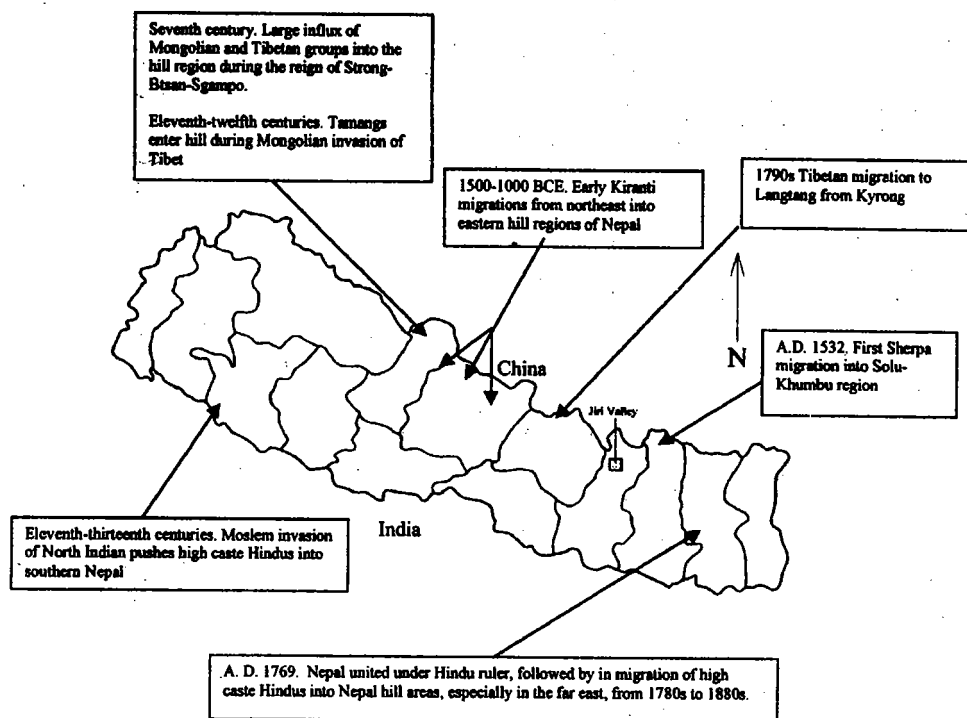
Another account suggests that the Jirels came from Simraungarh (Simraungadh), in the eastern Terai (Bista 1980:69). Muslim invaders destroyed Simraungadh in the 14th century and its Hindu ruling families and other survivors became refugees (on Simraungadh, see Miller 1997:113-114). After a long period of hardships in the Terai, they escaped to Dolakha. This account is noteworthy, because several Jirel clans worship gods said to dwell in Simraungarh. During religious rites (*puja*), the Jirel priest, or shaman, called a *Phombo*, beckons the clan god and the spirits of clan ancestors to come from their original homeland, Simraungarh, and manifest themselves in the *puja* place (see Sidky et al., "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal" and "*Phombos*: A Look at Traditional Healers Among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal", in this volume).

A third account indicates that the Jirels were a branch of the Tibeto-Burman speaking Kiranti tribes, which migrated from the northeast into the north eastern hill regions of Nepal (see Map), starting around 1000 BC (cf. Poffenberger 1980:31).

The local account has the Kiranti ancestors migrating to Jiri from Simraungarh, in the Terai. The Kiranti have been a part of the military and political history of Nepal for millennia and are famous for their bravery and prowess in battle. They are mentioned in the Hindu epics, *Ramyaana* and *Mahabharata* and were the ancient rulers of the Kathmandu Valley (Bista

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1980:33). As such, they offer an impressive pedigree to anyone claiming to be their descendants.



Map: Migration Patterns in the Hills of Nepal (after Poffenberger, 1980)

When asked how the various Jirel "clans" are related, the clan elders of the Thurbido, Devlinga, Chungpate, and Thungba affirmed that "before we had one ancestor. He is unknown, but he was Kiranti; then we divided into clans and could intermarry." Other clansmen provide a more detailed account. It appears that a long time ago a Kiranti royal family in Muklichhetra, having been defeated in war, fled to the Terai. There the family established itself for some 15 generations. These Kiranti were the descendants of five princes, Lal Singh, Ram Singh, Man Singh, Dhan Singh, and Sur Singh. Then, when the Muslims attacked, these Kiranti fled to Kathmandu, then the kingdom of Badgaun (Bahkhtapur), and after obtaining permission from the king settled in the eastern hills. The descendants of Sur Singh, the youngest of the five Kiranti princes, settled in the Jiri area to become the ancestors of the Jirels. Names such as Kiranti-Khasa (buildings) and Kiranti Thursa (graveyard) are mentioned as places in the retelling of the Jirel's Kiranti ancestry (Jirel 1990:12). Descendants of the other brothers are said to have become the ancestor of the other ethnic groups in the region, such as the Sunwars, Rais, Limbus, etc.

When clan elders were asked how Jirel clans can intermarry, given that according to this origin myth they all had the same common ancestor, the reply was that the clans are related in a "*kutumba*" relationship. The Jirels described this relationship saying that from now on you are "other" and so our people can marry your people.

There is a difference of opinion among the Jirels themselves regarding their ethnogenesis. Those who are politically conscious prefer the Kiranti pedigree. This may reflect modern day political realities, in which ethnic identity can be a significant factor. Moreover, there is also the fact that in traditional Nepali society hybridity has been equated with being impure and low status. There is considerable social stigma attached to such an identity. Thus, it is no surprise that the Jirels have constructed an origin myth that enables them to claim descent from high-caste Hindu rulers of the Terai as well as the distinguished Kiranti. The historical accuracy of this ethnogenesis is dubious because of the absence of tangible documentary evidence. It is, however, important as a cultural construct of the Jirels and how they view themselves and wish others to view them.

Social Organization

The Jirels are divided into 23 patrilineal, patrilocal descent groups, referred to in the literature as "clans" and "sub-clans." However, careful genealogical analysis of these groups suggests that they are better viewed as major and minor lineages. In the past, each of these descent groups held communal property rights under a system of land tenure called *kipat*. Individual households held hereditary rights to farmland, forest and pasture by virtue of their membership in a descent group. However, the criterion on the basis of which land and pasture were allocated to individual households is unclear (cf. Regmi 1976:88-92). Although each household owned and farmed their land individually, the *kipat* lands were in principal under communal ownership and could not be sold to outsiders and the descent group itself had reversionary rights (Regmi 1976:88-92).

There are 12 major Jirel "clans" and 11 "subclans." These clans and sub-clans are made up of patrilineally-extended, patrilocal families, comprised of parents, unmarried sons and daughters, and married sons, their wives and children. Jirel families, however, undergo change over time, as a result of deaths, daughters moving out upon marriage, brides being brought in by the sons, and the birth of grandchildren. Thus, at any given time one can expect to find nuclear families as well as extended families. Usually, when the family's first son marries, the new couple will reside with the groom's father's family. When a second son in the family is married, the eldest son and his wife and children will move out and establish their own household.

Only the youngest son will continue to live with his parents, forming what is called a "stem family" (cf. Goldstein 1977: 58; 1975), this domestic cycle of the Jirel family is similar to that of the Timling Tamang; described by Fricke (1994). Upon the death of the father, each of the sons inherits a share of the land and livestock. The youngest son, however, receives his share as well as the house and the contents of the house itself. Daughters usually do not receive land, but may get jewelry and other items at the discretion of their fathers at the time of their marriage.

Jirel clans include Thungba, Chawe-Thungba (sub-clan), Deppa, Thabo, Chawe-Thabo (sub-clan), Devlinga, Thurbido, Jupule, Serba, Chawe-Serba (sub-clan), Palpali, Myokpa, Chyaba, Garasamba, Chungpate, Garchiga (sub-clan), Jupule (sub-clan), Kyambole (sub-clan), Neware (sub-clan), Rarenje (sub-clan), Tumpule (sub-clan), Tungule (sub-clan), and Urbido (sub-clan).

Jirel sub-clans apparently were formed in several ways. If a person broke group exogamy rules, e.g., if he married his paternal cousin, the consequences would be expulsion from the clan, which would lead to the creation of a new kin group. The sub-clan Chawe-Serba was formed in this way. If a man broke the rule of group endogamy he would also be expelled. The Garchiga sub-clan was said to have formed as a result of such an infraction, but Garchiga elders could not name the ancestral group from which they broke off. Breaking the rule prohibiting celebrations during times of mourning, or not attending clan god worship, could lead to expulsion as well. This is said to be how the Chawe-Thungba sub-clan originated. After a sub-clan is formed, it is considered to be a separate descent group and intermarriage with members of the main group is permitted. Thus, members of the Thungba may intermarry individuals from the Chawe-Thungba without breaking the clan rule of group exogamy.

Referring to the Jirels in terms of "clans" and "sub-clans" is somewhat problematic and requires careful analysis. Lineages emerge out of patrilineality and patrilocal residence and tend to be corporate in nature, holding property in common. Members of lineages typically can trace their descent from an apical ancestor through known genealogical connections.

Lineages and patrilocality are conducive to a fissioning or segmentation process, leading to the subdivision of the lineages. For example, this would involve B, a son of A, who upon marriage, establishes his own residence apart, either for reasons of limited resources, or due to some ritual infractions. B's sons will retain their ties with their original parental lineage, but in accordance with the rules of patrilineality, they will refer to their new aggregations by a new appellation, such as the name of their immediate ancestor, i.e., B. Over time these groups may in turn break off

into sub-lineages of their own, let's say C and D, which would be organized on the basis of identical principles (cf. Murphy 1989:119-120). Members of these sub-lineages may trace back their founding ancestor B for four or five generations, but tracing ancestry to A, may involve a depth of 10 generations or more. If A had several other sons, X, Y, and Z, who also established their own lineages in the process described, the greater the depth of genealogical reckoning the larger and more inclusive the group would become.

Lineages are components of clans. Clansmen believe in their common descent, but are unable to demonstrate the linkages to a common ancestor. Once they reach the apical ancestor of their respective lineages, the genealogy terminates. This is precisely the case when one looks at the pedigrees for any of the Jirel "clans." For example, all the Thungba trace their ancestry through known links, six generations deep, to an apical ancestor named Bajraman, and similarly, the Chawe Thungba, which is referred to as a sub-clan of the Thungba, can reckon their descent through known links, five generations deep, to a common ancestor named Lolaman. This is true of all the other "clans" and "sub-clans" with the exception of two, the Jupule and the Palpali. The Jupule comprise two lineages, each about four generations deep. Members of both groups claim common ancestry and refer to themselves as Jupule, but they are unable to specify the apical common ancestor. Jupule elders noted that these two sub-clans are called middle-Jupule and lower-Jupule. The Palpali is comprised of five lineages, each with a depth of five generations. Members of these five groups refer to themselves as Palpali on the basis of a common ancestor, but are unable to name him. Thus, only the last two descent groups fit the definition of clans.

Members of any particular Jirel clan or sub-clan can trace their ancestry through known links for only about five or six generations. None of the 23 "clan" and "sub-clan" elders interviewed were able to provide actual genealogical links to the common or apical Kiranti ancestor for all the Jirels. In other words, the links between the various Jirel descent groups to the founding ancestor, as in the case of the elusive Sur Singh, and the Jirel's Kiranti pedigree, is based on a belief in common descent, but that is entirely putative.

Thus, it would be more appropriate to characterize Jirel social organization in terms of exogamous major and minor lineages that emerged through a process of fissioning or segmentation as described above. These decent groups held land in common, and traditionally followed lineage exogamy and group endogamy. Having pointed out these problems, we

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shall nevertheless use the terms clans and sub-clans in this paper, as these approximate Jirel emic categories.

Some Preliminary Observations on Jirel Kinship Terminology

All Jirel kin terms carry meanings that distinguish sex and relative age from ego's own generation up. In ascending generations, (G+1) ego's parents generation and (G+2), ego's grandparent's generation, other features of meaning such as lineality and collaterality (father's or mother's side) are significant in distinguishing the kin terms (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

The interpretation of Jirel kin terms can be expressed in classical terms, e.g., Hawaiian, Sudanese, etc. From ego's own generation down, the Jirel system applies the same terms to brothers and sisters and cousins (brother and sister terms), and ego's children and cousin's children (son and daughter terms). This would be labeled as the Hawaiian kinship terminology system. The ascending generations, however, could be classified as either Sudanese or Iroquoian (G+1) and Hawaiian (G+2). If compounds like *goppo chete* or *adjing tikti* are treated as primary lexemes, the system could be called Sudanese. If they are treated as adjective noun pairs, they would be called Iroquoian and Hawaiian.

The Jirel kin term system does make the distinctions that the Sudanese classification would require for the first ascending generation, but syntactic grounds alone are insufficient to claim otherwise. On the other hand labeling ego's grandparents' as Sudanese appears to be inaccurate. For instance, *goppo tikti*, refers equally to father's father's elder brother, father's mother's elder brother, mother's father's elder brother, and mother's mother's elder brother. Since the significant element here is relative age, the system resembles the Hawaiian terminology.

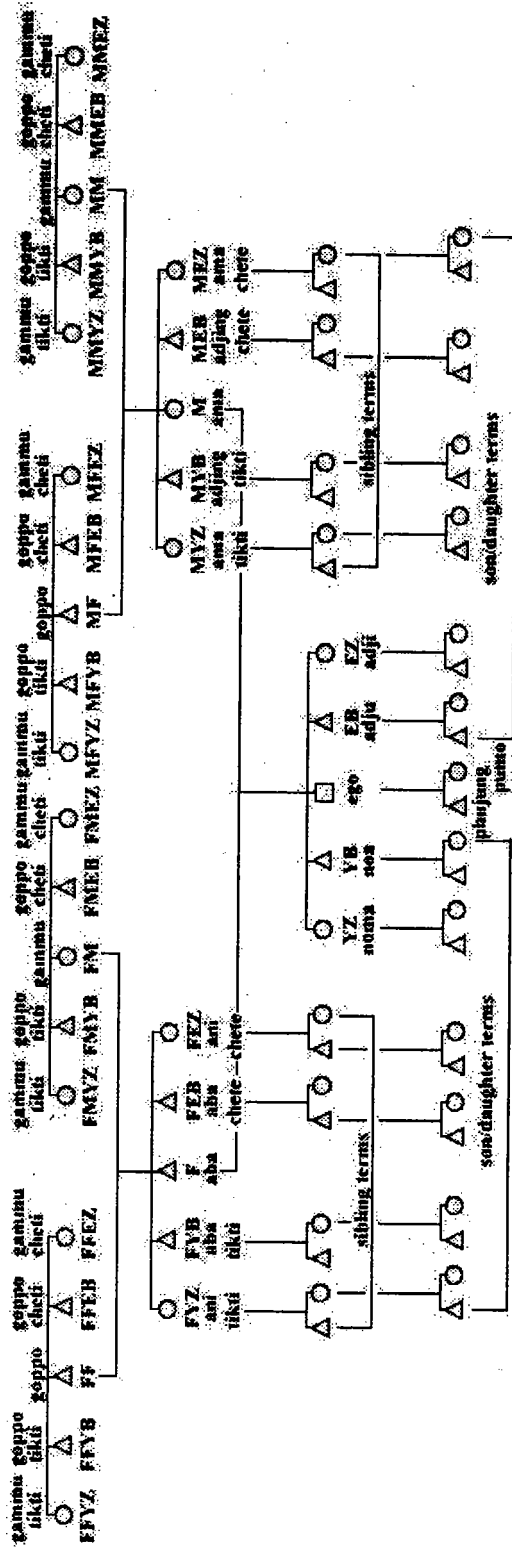


Figure 1
Jirel Kinship Chart

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Jirel kin terms represent one example on the theme of seniority that shows up in other aspects of Jirel life. Inheritance is based on seniority, as is the relative prestige of various ethnic groups. The Jirels consider themselves lower on the prestige scale than the Rais, Limbus, and Sunwars, because the Jirels were descendents of Sur Singh, the youngest of the five Kiranti princes, from whom all these ethnic groups are said to have descended.

Table-1
Kin Terms and Their Extensions

KIN TERM	EXTENSION
G+2	
Gammu	MM, FM
gammu chete	MMEZ, FMEZ
gammu tikti	MMYZ, FMYZ
goppo	MF, FF
goppo chete	MFEB, FFEB
goppo tikti	MFYB, FFYB
G+1	
ama	M
ama tikti	MYZ
ama chete	MEZ
adjing tikti	MYB
adjing chete	MEB
aba	F
aba tikti	FYB
aba chete	FEB
ani tikti	FYZ
ani chete	FEZ
EGO'S OWN GENERATION	YB; FEBYS, FEZYS, MEBYS, MYZYS, ETC. EB; FEBES, FEZES, MEBES, MYZES, ETC. EZ; FEBED, FEZED, MEBED, MYZED, ETC. YZ; FEBYD, FEZYD, MEBYD, MYZYD, ETC.
noa	
adju	
adji	
noma	
G-1	D; EBD, YZD, ETC. S; YBS, EZS, ETC.
pumo	
phujung	

Distribution of Jirel Clans

Members of Jirel clans and sub-clans are distributed among various villages. For example, the Thungba (45-50 households) are to be found mainly in the village of Kot, where they make up 46% of the total population, but some households are located in Dhunge, Bhandar, and Ratomate (percentages based on Williams-Blangero 1990:64). The Chawe-Thungba (14 households), a sub-lineage of the Thungba, are found in Bhandar, Takpa, Nabok, and Dhunge. The Deppa (35 households) reside mainly in Kharayoban, where they constitute 86% of the total population, but there are some households located in Lower Sikri and Ratomate. The Thabo (26 households) are concentrated mainly in Bhandar (46% of the village population), but some also reside in Gompaling, Yarsa, Raate, and Kot. The Devlinga (44 households) are concentrated in Kot, comprising over 26% of the total population there, but some households are to be found in Bhandar, Sisel, Ratomate, Junge, and Chetrapa. The Thurbido (15 households) are found mostly in Upper Sikri (26%), with some households located in Kot and Chetrapa.

Of the Jupule (45 households), the majority are found in Lower Sikri (63% of the total village population), but some households are to be found in Upper Sikri, Kharayoban, Dhunge, Bhandar, Kot, Junge. The Serba (47 households) are located in Upper Sikri (33% of village population), Lower Sikri (22% of the population), Ratomate (39% of the population), Dhunge (38% of the village's population), some households are also located in Gunsas, and Jungu. The Chawe-Serba (15 households), a sub-lineage of the former, are found in Lower Sikri, Renge, Ghunsa, and Sisel.

The Palpali (20 households) are found in Jungu (21% of village's population), Chetrapa (17% of the total village population), and some households are located in Dhunge, Lower Sikri, Upper Sikri, Bodle, and Takpa. The Myokpa (17 households), are located mostly in Chetrapa (30% of village population), Dhunge (21%), and Ratomate. The Chyba, (15 households) are situated in Bhandar, Tasite, Jungu, and Chepte.

The Garasamba (7 households) are found mainly in Bhaiselumbu. The Chungpate (8 households) are located in Ratomate (16% of the village population), Upper Sikri, and Lower Sikri. The Garasamba and Chungpate, although considered major descent groups, have very low membership. The reason for this, according to the elders of these clans, is migration of numerous households either to Kathmandu or India.

These data suggest that Jirel villages are composed of people affiliated with several descents groups, with particular clans predominating numerically. Inter-group relationships between these clans occur on a day-to-day basis taking place at the village and household levels.

Clan Relations and Inter-Clan Ritual Variations

Beyond the patrilineal descent lines utilized, the primary attributes that differentiate one Jirel clan from another are variation in ritual activities, the deities they worship, and the food taboos which they observe. For example, some clans, such as the Thungba, Jupule, and Garasamba worship the deity *Chen*, a male god, while the Chyaba and Chungpate worship the goddess *Chyomu*. The Chungpate do not offer blood sacrifice to their goddess, while the Thungba slaughter goats and chickens during their clan god rituals (see Sidky et al., "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume). These clan rituals took place at specific times of the year and were sponsored by rich families, who were obligated to conduct the rites for three consecutive years. The sponsors were expected to provide abundant quantities of food and drink, which was distributed among clan members and other guests. This process functioned as a mechanism for the reciprocal distribution of surplus foodstuffs and acted as a wealth leveling mechanism.

With respect to food taboos, all Jirels abstain from eating beef, following the Hindu practice. They may eat buffalo meat, but not yak's meat. The rationale given was that yaks and cows can mate and are therefore placed in the same animal category. Cows and buffaloes, however, cannot mate, therefore buffaloes are viewed as belonging in a different category. Some clans do not eat buffalo meat, e.g., the Deppa, while others do. The Deppa explained this by saying that their clan god hates buffaloes and so they will not eat its flesh. However, they are permitted to drink buffalo milk. The Deppa clan god is also said to hate sheep, and it is for this reason that members of this clan never kept any sheep, whereas other clans did so in the past. In previous times, none of the clans ate pork, but now they do, but to avoid the wrath of their respective gods, pork must be cooked outside the house. There are additional variations among the clans regarding other foodstuffs. Some clans eat stinging nettle, for instance the Thurbido and the Chungpate, while the Thabo have a taboo against it.

Jirel clans today do not hold communal lands, the ownership of which devolved upon individual households following the termination of the *kipat* system. However, clans do perform corporate functions by organizing labor for agricultural production. During crucial times in the agricultural calendar, such as millet planting or harvest, clan members pool their labor resources and work communally on their fields. According to their means, the host families provide food and *chang*, local beer made from fermented millet, for everyone.

Clan Structure and Marriage

Clan structure plays an important role in regulating marriages, and traditionally, the Jirels practiced clan exogamy. On the other hand, group endogamy was proscribed, and there was considerable stigma attached to marriage with non-Jirels. The offspring resulting from such a union would be pejoratively referred to as *themsing*, or "half-breed." Today, this rule is no longer observed and an analysis of the spouse selection patterns for the Thungba clan reveals marriages with women belonging to the Rai, Tamang, Magar, Sherpa, Sunwar, and Limbu ethnic groups. Additionally, it might be noted that Thungba men have also married Chhetri, Brahman, and Shrestha (Newar) caste spouses. A number of Thungba women as well have married into these ethnic groups.

In general, patrilineality and patrilocality were the rule among the Jirels. Most marriages were monogamous, although there were a few cases of polygyny reported in the valley, especially among the more affluent Jirels. Traditionally, the families of prospective spouses arranged their marriages. But marriages based on romantic love are fairly common now. In the past, group endogamy resulted in a pattern of between-village residence changes, since numerical dominance of a particular clan in a woman's natal village influenced the potential mate pool size. This led, in turn, to the selection of mates from other villages. Geographical proximity influences mate selection. For example, clans living in the village of Chetrapa and the neighboring Jungu, which are located some distance from other villages, tend to intermarry more frequently (Williams-Blangero and Blangero, 1990). Among the residents of the other villages, most of which are clustered together, a pattern of preferential mate exchange has been detected among certain clans (see Williams-Blangero 1990).

Sociologically, marriage establishes alliances based on mutual economic support and reciprocal obligations between descent groups, symbolically affirmed with the exchange of gifts after the wedding and at various other times, such as the birth of the new couple's first child, or in other life-cycle rituals. Additionally, the bride's family was obligated to attend rituals hosted by the groom's clan.

Clan Leadership

Clan leadership was traditionally based on age. The role of clan elders, as both the oldest and wisest of all, was to resolve conflicts both within and between clans. Clan members would also seek elders' advice in settling disputes in matters relating to clan protocol. Moreover, the clan leader had authority to intervene in disputes and thus functioned in a role that ensured

harmony and solidarity among clan members and lessened disputes between clans. Issues of mutual interest between two or more clans were dealt with on an informal basis, through a meeting of clan elders.

As a society based on descent groups, the Jirels had a rather diffuse, decentralized political system, similar to other inhabitants of the eastern hills, such as the Rais, Limbus, and Sherpas. This does not mean there was an egalitarian organization, since some clans had higher prestige than others. Members of the major clans consider themselves to be equals, sub-clans, however, occupy a somewhat inferior position with respect to the clan from which they broke away. Thus, the Thungba and Serba have a higher status with respect to their sub-clans, Chawe-Thungba and Chawe-Serba. Historically, the most prestigious and politically powerful Jirel clan was the Serba. In 1795, these clansmen obtained, through a treaty with the Gurkha King, rights to all of the land in the Jiri Valley, or the Jiri *kipat*.

Under the *kipat* system each part of a patrilineal descent group was connected with a specific geographical territory and given individual hereditary usufruct rights to land, forest and pasture by virtue of affiliation with a descent group. *Kipat* land was owned and farmed by individuals, but in principal was under communal clan ownership and could not be sold or alienated to anyone outside the community. The clan had reversionary rights over the land in the case of abandonment by families who had previously used it (Regmi 1976:88-92). It is likely that all of the various Jirel clans had their own *kipat* lands in the Jiri Valley, prior to the outside intervention of the central government in Kathmandu.

The Serba were in fact granted the Jiri *kipat* by the government in exchange for the performance of certain duties. This was part of the overall strategy used by the Gurkhas to bring the eastern hills people under their control (cf. Rose and Scholz 1980:19; Regmi 1976:90). Under agreement, Nayadanre, the head of the Serba clan, would be the *mulmi*, the King's representative in the region, with the power to collect taxes from the Jirels in exchange for rights to farmlands and pastures which they occupied. Through the control of land, the Serbas also gained control of fodder and fuel-collecting rights, as these activities were conducted on *kipat* land. A stipulated fee was collected mainly in the form of *ghiu* (clarified butter), and probably other foodstuffs, from each household, regardless of the size of the fields and amount of pasture it used.

In practice, however, very little of the tax collected actually went to the district headquarters because of Jiri's remoteness. Thus, under the *kipat* system, the Serba became fairly wealthy with respect to the other clans, but they lost their prominent position as a result of the encroachment of literate, rich high-cast Hindus, mostly Chhetris, who settled in the region.

As outsiders, Chhetris could not acquire land directly, but they could and did arrange mortgages of *kipat*. This "possessory mortgage" (cf. Regmi 1976:95) was tantamount to ownership rights, which the Chhetris obtained in return for their money-lending services, in a process very similar to that which occurred elsewhere in the eastern hills of Nepal (cf. Rose and Scholz 1980:20).

As a result, much of the Jiri-*kipat* fell into Hindu hands, leading to the establishment of a large Chhetri community in the Jiri Valley. The *mulmi*'s power was thus undermined, and the Chhetri became a dominant economic and political force in Jiri. The Serba clan continued to collect taxes on the lands it still controlled. The *kipat* system, already undermined by Hindus who controlled much of the land and cash in the eastern hills, ended in 1968, with new national legislation bringing communal lands under the direct authority of the central government (cf. Poffenberger 1980: 52; Regmi 1976:102-103).

Since the 1950s a number of other factors have impinged upon traditional Jirel society as they were pulled into Nepal's national economy and political administrative structure. The effects on the Jirel economy resulting from direct government control of pastures and forests have already been noted above. The construction of the Lamosangu-Jiri Road and other developmental efforts, such as the establishment of schools, a hospital, and opportunities for wage labor, have monetarized the traditional Jirel economy, which had been based on reciprocity.

One may attribute the breakdown of group endogamy, in part, to these changes. The criterion of upward social mobility has become increasingly important in spouse selection, as young Jirel men and women seek educated spouses from economically well-off ethnic groups. Being a *themsing* no longer has the stigma once attached to it, provided that the mix-married couple is economically successful. Clan reciprocity has weakened considerably, as families now compete for economic advancement and status in a cash economy. This is an economy that is largely controlled by non-Jirels. The lure of cash compelled many Jirels to sell their land to petty businessmen who moved into the valley following the completion of the Lamosangu-Jiri Road, which then became the main route to the Mount Everest Base Camp. These opportunistic merchants had been owners of businesses on the old trail to the Everest Base Camp, a distance of several hours walk away from Jiri. This led to a further reduction of land resources under Jirel control (see Hamill et al., "Some Sociocultural Consequences of Transportation and Development in the Jiri Valley, Nepal, in this volume; for the negative effects of such developmental activities elsewhere in Nepal,

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see Karan and Ishii, 1994; B. Shrestha, 1992; and N. Shrestha, 1997, 1992, 1985).

Finally, one indicator of the breakdown of clan solidarity is the total cessation of the public clan god worship rituals, which previously functioned to reaffirm group solidarity and operated as a wealth-leveling mechanism and a means of reciprocally distributing wealth. The numerous clan elders interviewed noted that no such ceremonies have been held for at least 20-to-30 years, and the reason given is that such ceremonies are too expensive.

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JIREL RELIGION: A PRELIMINARY LOOK AT THE RITES AND RITUALS OF THE JIRELS OF EASTERN NEPAL

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Introduction

The Jirels practice what Bista (1980:71) has called Lamaistic Buddhism, but they also visit Hindu shrines and observe many calendrical Hindu rituals, as well as adhering to their own indigenous shamanistic religious beliefs. These beliefs are centered around practitioners called *Phombo*. Spirit possession, spirit forces, and ancestor worship play a central role in the world-view of the Jirels (as well as Nepali people in general), and the *Phombo* holds a key position in this world-view. The situation is, however, more complex than that. For example, according to Macdonald (1997: xx): "The importance of spirit possession in Nepal is now widely recognised; but it is still difficult to situate this phenomenon against the general background of Nepalese religion ...[which is] generally portrayed as a syncretism of Hinduism and Buddhism rooted in an all-pervasive animism" (see also Reinhard 1976; Hitchcock and Jones 1976; Valeix et al. 1972).

The Jirels have their own Lamas, men who, according to local tradition, had traveled to Tibet in order to obtain religious training. There is also a Jirel *gumba* (Buddhist monastery), built recently near Lower Kot, where students are trained to become Buddhist monks. Some Jirels are also receiving training at a large Sherpa *gumba*, which is located on the northwest of the valley, above Dhunge village. Because of certain doctrinal variations, if these Jirel monks are to practice in their own community, they need an additional six months of tutelage under an established Jirel Lama.

It has been suggested that Buddhism had probably spread into the eastern hills of Nepal about 500 years ago, with the arrival of Sherpas from Tibet (cf. Poffenberger 1980: 30-32; Fürer-Haimendorf, 1964). The Jirels,

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however, affirm that it was they themselves who adopted Buddhism after two Jirel men, Hongjuli and Gari Lama, from the Devlinga clan, who went to Tibet and brought Buddhism back to the Jirels. According to Devlinga genealogy, this event occurred about five generations ago.

There appear to be several differences between the religious doctrines and rituals associated with the Sherpas and the Jirels. A different text is used by the Jirels, called *Dawa Kundu*, while the Sherpas use the *Lama Doma*. The main variations, however, appear to be in the rituals followed, for example, in the conduct of funeral rites. In these rituals the Sherpa and Jirel Lamas use different procedures for lighting lamps and making the *tormas*, which are representations or temporary abodes for the gods, made from rice mixed with butter. These are made in different numbers, sizes, shapes, and colors. In the final rites, held 40 days after a person has died, called *ghewa*, the Jirel Lamas conduct a procedure known as *sensing*, during which they beckon the spirit of the deceased to possess one of the relatives and relay any final messages before departing for the other world. This is absent in the Sherpa funeral rites. Finally, if for some reason a Sherpa Lama is engaged to conduct funeral rites for a Jirel, he is forbidden to touch the body of the deceased, whereas a Jirel Lama may do so.

As far as the Jirels' Hindu ritualism is concerned, they affirm that although they are Buddhists, they respect Hindu deities as well. According to one clan elder, "we will stop and pray at a Hindu shrine or temple, for good luck, and if our prayers are answered, we continue to pray at the shrine." There are numerous Hindu shrines in the valley, the most famous being Jiri Shuri, which had its own Brahman priest until a few years ago. Jirels would go there to pray, make offerings of coins, and receive *tika* (the Hindu practice of placing a red mark between the eyebrows after making an offering to a deity). Jirels also engage the services of Brahman priests who consult astrological charts in order to determine the appropriate day for the naming of their children.

The Jirels follow the Hindu calendrical rituals, celebrating *Maghe Sangkranti*, *Saune Sangkranti*, *Chaite Dasain*, *Dasami Tika* (*Dasain*), *Bhai Tika* (*Tihar*), with the same degree of enthusiasm as they have in observing *Lohsar*, the Buddhist New Year's Day celebration (for further information on the festivals of Nepal, see Anderson 1975).

Additionally, all Jirels worship the "new god," called *Naya*. Each house has an altar, devoted to *Naya*, comprising a box that is attached to the outside wall of the house. Why this deity has come to be called the "new god" Jirel elders were unsure, but they suggested that perhaps people adopted this god in more recent times. They were, however, unsure as to exactly when this occurred. In *Naya's* box, the Jirels put offerings of coins, cloth,

rice, one chicken egg, and several miniature representations of the trident of Shiva (a Hindu god), called *trisul*. At harvest time, offerings are made to *Naya*, and people pray for good fortune and for the health of their children and livestock.

Each family keeps one chicken dedicated and named for this god. They pluck-out one of its feathers and place it in the box, saying, "this is your chicken." When a baby or an animal becomes ill, they take the egg, coin, or feather and rub it over their body to heal them. These items are then returned to the box. Another way that the healing powers of *Naya* may be tapped is to anoint the dedicated live chicken with water, and use the water to bless the patient. If for some reason a family needs to sell *Naya's* chicken, they must reimburse the god. Not to have done so will assure that *Naya* will become angry and inflict sickness upon the family, in such forms as headaches, dizziness, body pains, and vomiting. To be cured of these conditions the Jirels must seek the services of the *Phombos*, because these illnesses, they say, are of a supernatural nature and cannot be treated by modern medicines. In turn, the *Phombos* frequently attribute illnesses and other misfortunes to *Naya's* wrath.

The Jirels also worship the snake god, known as *Loo*, this is probably the same as *Naaga*, the Hindu serpent god. There are particular sites at the base of trees where altars to *Loo* are constructed. People make offerings and worship this god at these sites. The "snake god" is, however, slowly losing its popularity, although people may make offerings to it at harvest time. Most of the altars dedicated to *Loo* have fallen into disrepair and are overgrown with weeds. The power of *Loo*, however, is not forgotten or taken for granted. When a man who is walking in the forest is suddenly overcome with illness, the Jirels say he stepped on *Loo's* sacred ground. The remedy for this type of illness is also to seek out the services of a *Phombo*.

The Jirels may be seen as displaying a remarkable heterodoxy in their religious beliefs, having adopted elements and concepts from various traditions and downplaying any points of incongruity between them. Similar syncretisms have been reported among other hill peoples of this region and may be attributed to the effects of centuries of interactions between the various ethnic communities with diverse beliefs and traditions, all of which occurred under Hindu religious and cultural hegemony (cf. Rose and Scholz 1980: 73).

Clan Rituals and *Phombos*

The Jirels call the *Phombos* "priests," but these practitioners are more than simply individuals who passively perform rituals to appease the gods. *Phombos* are believed to have a direct and personal relationship with the

supernatural world. They pound their drums, chant mantras, dance, and enter into trance-like states, during which they voluntarily become possessed by supernatural beings, ancestral spirits, or particular deities (see Sidky et al., "*Phombos*: A Look at Traditional Healers among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume for a complete description). The *Phombo* incarnates the spirits and deities, but is able to control and restrain them. Once possessed, the *Phombo* begins to shake and shiver. This is the tangible manifestation that the gods or spirits have entered into his body. He can then communicate with these gods, who may speak through him, thereby obtaining information necessary to heal patients or to amend any distresses affecting the community.

In the past, the Jirel *Phombos* performed all rituals, including funerals, marriages, and other life-cycle observances. After the Jirels adopted Buddhism, however, the performance of funeral rites, such as cremation and last rites (*ghewa*), held 40 days later, were taken over by the Lamas. Jirel Lamas have drawn on some of the practices and beliefs of the *Phombos*. One of the most famous Jirel Lamas, Pusing Lama (d. 1996) was at first a *Phombo*, but later underwent training to become a Buddhist priest. This was confirmed for us by his son, who is now himself a practicing Lama and healer. Pusing Lama incorporated elements of both traditions in his professional repertoire (cf. Williams-Blangero et al., 1995). We encountered at least one practicing *Phombo* who was personally trained into that profession by Pusing Lama. Jirel Lamas, like the *Phombos*, act as healers by uttering mantras, blowing blessings (called *phukphak*), and dispensing charms, known as *buti*. Unlike the *Phombo*, however, the Lama does not enter into a trance or undergo spirit possession.

In their ability to physically incarnate the spirits of the ancestors and gods, the *Phombos* are central to the *kul devata* rites, or clan god worship—as illustrated by the Devlinga clan stopping its ceremonies altogether when their last *Phombo* died. The Devlinga had a rule that only a *Phombo* from their own clan could perform the *kul devata* rituals. Other clans, however, appear not to observe such a rule. But they too stopped their ceremonies with the demise of the *Phombos*. The Chungpate stopped their clan god rites after the death of the *Phombo* priest of *Chyomu*, who is the Chungpate clan god. Both of these cases clearly illustrate the significant role of the *Phombos* in the clan god ceremonies. Little has been written about Jirel clan gods and ancestral spirits or the rituals performed in their honor. It is for this reason that the remainder of this paper shall focus particular attention to this aspect of Jirel religion.

The Jirels in general stopped observing these communal rites 20 to 30 years ago, although the Deppa clan held such a ceremony in 1990, but none

since. The cessation of clan god worship (called *kul puja*) coincided with a period in which the Lamasangu-Jiri Road was constructed. This opened up the valley to the outside world and numerous socioeconomic changes followed (see Hamill et al., "Some Socio-Cultural Consequences of Transportation Development in the Jiri Valley, Nepal," in this volume). Involvement in a cash economy, the disintegration of clan solidarity, and the declining numbers of the *Phombos*, may all be cited as contributing causes for the termination of clan god worship.¹

The Jirels worship several deities, as well as their own particular clan gods. The god of the Deppa clan is *Lha*. The Thungba, and the associated sub-clan Chewe-Thungba worship *Chen*. *Chen* is also worshipped by the Garasamba, Jupule, and Thabo clans. Elders from these clans could not explain why they worship the same god, other than that it has been that way as long as they can remember. The phenomenon may be an indication that these descent groups may have at one time been closely connected genealogically, later fissioning off into different distinct descent groups, while retaining their common religious ideologies.

Another cluster of Jirel clans, the Serba, Thurbido and Chüngpate worship the god *Chyomu*. The Thungba also worship *Chyomu* in preliminary rites, prior to paying devotion to their main god, *Chen*; but the sub-clan Chewe-Thungba does not. The Devlinga and Meyokpa clan worship *Nangy Laha* (also called *Kalincho*). The Garchinga clan worship the god *Cheramjo*. The Palpali clan, however, has no particular god, making it an exception. Palpali clansmen say that they pray to Buddha, *Naya*, and *Loo*. These deities are also worshipped by all other Jirels, as well as the various other ethnic groups who live in the Jiri Valley.

While there are variations in *kul devata* worship, these activities have one thing in common. They are a means of ensuring prosperity, good fortune, and appeasing the gods and ancestral spirits. Given the importance of the rites for the well-being of the descent group, it was the social obligation of every household that possesses the necessary resources to hold *kul devata* worship, to sponsor the ritual activities.

A family that hosts the *kul puja* is obligated to do so for three consecutive years, before another family takes over the duty. This is a requirement observed by all Jirel clans with respect to their clan gods. It was explained that the deities and clan ancestors will be pleased if a family commits to three years of hosting the ritual, three being an auspicious number for the Jirels.

***Lha* Worship**

Deppa clan members have a small *puja* room dedicated to their clan god, and it is within this room that *Lha*, a male god who controls the sun and

the moon, is worshipped. Within this room the Deppa have a stone altar, with the picture of the sun depicted on the right side and the picture of the moon on the left side. The Deppa claim that the sun and the moon are the guardians of their people and their crops. Ordinarily, members of the family put rice and holy water (*jangli*) before the stone altar whenever there is a full moon. Only men are permitted to enter the *puja* room. If women enter or see the room, it is said, that they will become sick.

At the appointed time, during the full moon night in April, the wall of the *puja* room is decorated with red flowers, and pots of *chang*, the local millet beer, are placed before the altar. *Chang* is indispensable in the ritual and festive lives of the Jirels, while raw millet is never offered to the gods. According to Jirel clansmen, "millet is not a god crop."

The Deppa possess an array of ritual objects used during their clan god ceremony, such as the implements used in making *tormas*, *torma*-holders, *chang* pots, plates to hold the left over of *chang* offerings (*sezho*), and pots for offering maize, and barley. These are communally owned by the clan and are passed on to the next family that hosts *kul puja*.

Unlike the other clans, whose *kul puja* is supervised by a *Phombo*, the Deppa themselves perform most of the procedures. Clan members and guests arrive at the home of the host, bringing chickens and other foodstuffs. The host must provide the bulk of the sacrificial animals and the food. This can amount to a tremendous economic burden. Attendance for members of the clan is obligatory. Should circumstance prevent them from attending, they must formally ask to be excused by the clan elder.

The worshippers (called *naksung*) collectively beckon their god and the spirits of their ancestors from their "original homeland" in Simraungadh to come to them (for further information on Simraungadh, see Ballinger 1976). This *kul devata* enterprise, in which clansmen gather with the singular purpose of paying homage to their god and the spirits of clan ancestors is an overt expression of group identity and solidarity.

It is said that *Lha*, who is in the company of the clan's ancestral spirits, stops at every Deppa village during his journey, travelling along a spiritual pathway. The *naksung* ask him to come through every gate and over each boundary and name specific places along the spiritual trail, starting at Simraungadh, then proceeding on to Khurkot, Rjagaun, Manthah, Namadi, Pulping, Buridiyan. Kharayoban, Lower Sikri, and finally arriving at the *puja* room. Deppa say that, once the god and his spirit companions arrive everything "appears golden," and the people feel joyful, and they throw flour and rice at the altar. The god and ancestral spirits are thought to be physically present among the worshippers.

After the god and spirits arrive, animals are sacrificed inside the room and everything is drenched in blood. A black goat is sacrificed for the sun and a white goat is offered to the moon. Elder clansmen were unable to explain the symbolic significance of the color of the sacrificial animals. In addition, to the goats, 20 cocks are sacrificed as well. After the animals are killed, the clansmen extract their internal organs and remove the hair from the goat carcasses. Then they put all of the carcasses near the altar and offer prayers to the god and ancestors for good luck, bountiful crops, etc.

On completion of the ritual those in attendance send the god and ancestral spirits back along the same spiritual pathway they came. Thereupon the meat is cut into pieces and cooked. Afterwards everyone sits on the floor and a great quantity of *chang* is served. Next, members of the clan and guests come and bow before the seated clan elders and the host. They do this by touching their heads to the elders' feet in an act of homage. Following this the food is served.

The Deppa clan also observe a number of food taboos. They have a religious prohibition against eating buffalo meat. However, there are no restrictions regarding buffalo's milk or cheese. The elders explained that the reason for this taboo that *Lha* dislikes these animals, but they were unable to explain why the god has an aversion to buffaloes. *Lha* also is described as hating sheep, so for this reason, Deppa clansmen never kept sheep nor did they eat mutton, whereas members of other clans did. In the past, it was also taboo for the Deppa to eat garlic, but this restriction no longer applies. Stinging nettle, which is boiled and eaten by many Jirels, is also a taboo food item, and again the reason for the taboo is forgotten.

Some of these restrictions may be syncretisms of Hindu beliefs. For example, the Brahmans and Chhetris view the buffalo as a vehicle of *Yamaraj*, the god of Death, and killer of gods. For this reason, members of these Hindu castes will not eat the flesh of buffaloes. Stinging nettle is also considered a taboo food by Brahmans and Chhetris.

The Deppa pray to *Lha* during every full moon and change the holy water that is left before his altar. At harvest time, maize and wheat are offered in the *puya* room, and they pray to this god in times of sickness, and crop disease, and give him offerings before marriage ceremonies are held. However, he is not called upon during funerals or births.

Chen Worship

The Thungba, Chawe-Thungba, Jupule, Garasamba, and Thabo worship the god *Chen*. The Thungba ceremony is nearly identical to the ceremonies of other *Chen* worshippers. The *kul puya* takes place once a year, but the scheduling of its actual date varies. It must be conducted during a full moon

in January, February, or April. The host family begins preparations by assembling 60 to 70 chickens, along with one egg for each bird. A large quantity of rice is cooked for the guests and many liters of *chang* are brewed in preparation for the occasion.

The ceremony is conducted by the *Phombo* and his assistants, called *choyupa*, who make *tormas* (representations of the gods) out of rice mixed with butter. Clan members gather at the home of the host and here they pay their respect to clan elders and wish each other a good fortune. Such a gathering of clan members and their participation in the ceremonies is again an overt expression of their group identity and cohesion.

The Thungba ritual is conducted in two stages. While preparations are being made, they pay homage to a goddess called *Chyomu*, in a ritual called *Tharshyo*. This ritual must be completed prior to the beginning of the rites for *Chen*. *Tharshyo* begins with clansmen raising a flag on a tree that is then blessed with *chang*. Then they beseech *Chyomu* not to be angry with them for their upcoming worship of *Chen*, an occasion calling for blood sacrifice. Thungba are unable to explain why they have to placate *Chyomu*, before they can worship their god, other than noting the goddess's dislike of blood sacrifice. Thungba informants are also unsure of the exact relationship between *Chen* and *Chyomu*, but speculate that perhaps the deities are brother and sister, or even husband and wife. Therefore, to worship *Chen*, *Chyomu* has to be placated. For three days, during *Tharshyo* no one is allowed to slaughter any animals or eat meat. It might be hypothesized that *Tharshyo* expresses indirectly the inherent contradiction or tension between the Buddhist interdiction against the taking of life and the Hindu acceptance of blood sacrifice, both of which have been incorporated in the syncretic religion of the Jirels.

While religious rites associated with *Chyomu* are conducted inside the house, the rituals associated with *Chen* are held outside, as the Thungba say in the "jungle." Here the host family selects a large tree and constructs an altar at its base where they place a *torma* to represent *Chen*. Then they make *tormas* for each of the eggs. When this is completed they place the *torma* representing *Chen* on the altar and arrange the other *tormas* and the eggs around it. The worship place is known as *lashing*. The *Phombo*, next, lights a lamp and burns incense (*sasing*) and begins to pound on his drum, called *Nga*, and invokes *Chen* and the clan ancestors to come from Simraungadh, naming each location they must pass through, until they reach the *lashing*. The *Phombo* becomes very agitated and starts to tremble when *Chen* is nearby. Finally, the *Phombo*, who is now in a trance and shaking violently and pounding his drum, announces the god's arrival. It is believed that the god has taken possession of the *Phombo* at this point.

Chickens are now sacrificed and their blood is scattered on the *tormas* and the altar. The chickens are cut open, and their livers are extracted. These are fried and offered to the god at the altar. Clan members then say prayers to the god and the spirits of their ancestors. Upon completion of the ceremony, the god and ancestor spirits are sent back and the worshippers attend a big feast, which includes chicken, and great quantities of *chang* and rice. Once again the host family provides the bulk of the food consumed at the feast.

It is interesting to note that the Thabo, Garasamba, and Jupule, who also worship *Chen* in a ceremony very much like that of the Thungba, do not worship *Chyomu*. Clansmen could not explain the reason for this.

The Thungba, Chewe-Thungba, Jupule, Garasamba, and Thabo invoke *Chen* at all life-cycle ceremonies, such as the naming ceremony (*nwaran*), rice-feeding (*pasni*), when a child receives its first solid food, a hair-cutting ceremony (*chewar*), when little boys at the age of 5 have their hair cut for the first time, and final funeral rites (*ghewa*), when the spirit of the deceased person is called upon and enters into the body of a relative and conveys final messages.

There is yet another variation among these clansmen who worship *Chen*. The Garasamba in Bhaiselumbu village also worship a female deity called *Bajhu Abhi* (probably the Hindu goddess, *Bhagabati*). According to Garasamba elders, they acquired her from the village of Jungu, during a magical duel between their *Phombo*, and *Phombos* living in Jungu. After taking the idol, the *Phombo* put it inside the Garasamba *pupa* room and thereafter, out of reverence to this goddess, the Garasamba stopped cooking buffalo meat inside their houses.

The circumstances surrounding this event sheds a unique light on one aspect of Jirel religious beliefs. The Garasamba say that the ancestor of their lineage was a *Phombo* and that at that time there were many powerful *Phombos* in the village of Jungu. There was much rivalry between these *Phombos*. Each one wanted to demonstrate their powers and to be recognized as the most powerful *Phombo*, so as to recruit more followers and hence more income. In their competition they began a war of spells with the Garasamba ancestor. *Phombos* fought by going to a holy place (*jatra*), where people gather and worship. Here they would challenge one another by uttering incantations and performing their rites. The *Phombo* who could stop the other *Phombos* from shivering was acknowledged as the winner. The defeated *Phombo* would accept the triumphant party as his guru. In this rivalry the Garasamba *Phombo* was victorious, and upon his victory he confiscated the goddess of the Jungu *Phombos* and brought her to Bhaiselumbu.

This was an important victory because the goddess *Bajhu Abhi* (*Bagabati*) and *Mahadi* (Lord Shiva) are the primary deities worshipped by the *Phombos* and *Jhankris* (see Sidky et al., "*Phombos: A Look at Traditional Healers Among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal*," in this volume). Following this event, an altar was built for *Bajhu Abhi* in Lower Sikri. The *Garasamba* go there to worship, taking a bowl of *chang* and a sickle (a female weapon, *hasi*) or a bell. As an act of respect, the man carrying these must remain silent until he has made the offerings, only then may he speak. No other Jirel clan worships this goddess, but Brahmins and Chhetris living in the valley do so. They also offer bells and tridents (*trisul*), but never bring *chang*.

***Nangy Laha* Worship**

The Devlinga and Meyokpa clans worship *Nangy Laha*. This is a mountain god associated with Kalinchok, a peak in the Dolakha district. This place has special significance to *Phombos*, who make annual pilgrimages there (see Miller 1997:11). The Devlinga clan once had numerous *Phombos* who worshipped at Kalinchok, this may explain why Devlinga worshipped this deity. The date of *kul puja* is on the first full moon of January. As with other clans, the family who wishes to organize this ritual is obligated to do so for three consecutive years. Members of the Devlinga are obligated to keep one cock for their clan god and bring it with them at the time of *kul puja*. While the relatives are assembled, they pay their respects to their clan elders and the host of the *kul puja*, reaffirming their kinship bonds with one another and with their ancestral spirits, as well as asserting their own positions within the descent group.

Nangy Laha is worshipped inside the house, but there is no specific *puja* room. The *Phombo* leads the ceremony. A *torma* is placed against one wall; or else rice is piled up in the shape of a mountain, to represent this god. After offering the god *chang*, holy water (*jangli*), and burning incense (*sasing*), the *Phombo* begins pounding his drum and starts to shake and shiver and calls on the god and clan ancestor spirits to come from Simraungadh. Again, each place the god and ancestor spirits must traverse is named in turn, until their presence is finally announced in the room. The *Phombo* sacrifices a cock and sprinkles the blood on the *torma*. Next, the head of the household who is hosting the rites kills a chicken and scatters its blood on the *torma* as well. Finally, members of other houses who have brought a cock, each according to age, are permitted to sacrifice their birds. The god and ancestors are then sent back and the assembly sits down to a feast of chicken, rice and abundant amounts of *chang*.

The Devlinga found themselves confronted with a dilemma concerning the blood sacrifice ritual when they converted to Buddhism. Here again we encounter a similar tension expressed in the *Tharshyo* rites performed by the Thungba. According to local Jirel tradition, as noted earlier, men from the Devlinga clan are credited for going to Tibet and bringing Buddhism to the Jiri Valley. After conversion, clan members were in contention over the issue of blood sacrifice. Some sided with the *Phombos*, insisting that sacrifice was necessary, whereas others sided with the Lamas, who opposed the practice. The issue was never resolved because the *puja* to *Nangy Laha* stopped about 15 years ago, upon the death of the last Devlinga *Phombo*, the only one permitted to perform the rites for the clan. Devlinga still raise a cock in honor of their god, but instead of killing it they sell it and offer the money gained to charity. Offerings are made to *Nangy Laha* at harvest time, and he is invoked during life-cycle ceremonies.

***Cheramjo* Worship**

The Garchiga worship *Cheramjo*. The Garchiga are a sub-clan, but Garchiga elders do not remember the clan from which they broke off. They report that the split occurred as a result of a marriage by a clansman with a Chhetri female. This was how the Garchiga, which means "newly made family" was formed.

Cheramjo, glossed "holy snowy mountain," is associated with *Gouri Shankar*, by Jirel informants. This mountain has twin-peaks, the higher peak is said to be a male deity, while the lower one is said to be a female deity. *Gouri Shankar* refers to Parvati, wife of Lord Shiva and to Lord Shiva himself. *Cheramjo*, however, are Jirel deities in other contexts, not Hindu ones, and they were originally associated with a mountain in Simraungadh. That *Cheramjo* has become affiliated with *Gouri Shankar*, Hindu deities, is yet another example of the syncretic nature of Jirel religious beliefs.

The Garchiga worship these deities inside their houses. They hold the *puja* on the first full moon night of November. Unlike the Deppa clan, they do not conduct any activities on behalf of these deities on other full moon nights. As with the other clans, the same family must host the ritual for three consecutive years.

A *Phombo* and his assistants perform the *puja*. On the day of the *puja* they paint a picture of the mountain on a wall near the sleeping area. Then the *Phombo* offers *chang*, and holy water, and burns incense (*sasing*). At the beginning of his performance, he calls the god and goddess to come to the *puja* place. Then a series of chicken sacrifices follows. First they sacrifice a cock and scatter its blood and then hens are sacrificed and their blood

scattered. When asked about the significance of cocks and hens sacrificed, Garchiga elders explained that the number of cocks sacrificed must always exceed the number of hens, saying that this is how it has been done traditionally. The group then prays for health, fertility of their crops, and good fortune in the coming year.

The Garchiga call on *Cheramjo* when ever someone is sick, and when a child is being born; but they do not paint the picture of the deity on the wall on these occasions. Offerings are also made to this deity in a first-fruits ceremony during harvest time, when the first of wheat and maize are brought in.

The Worship of *Chyomu*

The Serba, Thurbido and Chungpate clans worship *Chyomu*, a female deity to which we have already referred when discussing the clan rituals of the Thungba. *Chyomu* is a goddess also associated with a mountain, *Gauri Parbat* (Mountain of Shiva's wife). Some informants believe her to be the same as the female deity worshipped by the Garchiga. The Serba clan's worship of *Chyomu* is similar to that practiced by the Thurbido and Chungpate clans. The *puja* ritual is held on either the first full moon night of November, or January. Again, as with the other clans, the family that organizes the ceremony is obligated to do so for three consecutive years.

Preparations for the ceremony begin with the brewing of a great quantity of *chang*, and then all clan members and other guests assemble. A *Phombo* and four assistants conduct the rituals. The *Phombo* is required to ritually bathe and abstain from eating meat for three days before the ceremony. The activities are conducted inside the *puja* room and women are allowed to participate because *Chyomu* is female. At night they make one large *torma*, called a *solbo*, out of 28 kgs. of rice to represent *Chyomu*. Four small *tormas*, called *choyupa*, are made to represent other mountain deities. Altogether about 40 kgs. of rice are used. Coins are placed near these *tormas* and they are coated with *ghiu* (clarified butter). Later, the *Phombo* offers *chang* to the gods and burns incense, while the relatives and guests eat and drink *chang* all night long. In the morning, when the sun rises above *Gauri Parbat*, with its glistening rays revealing the goddess's blissfulness, the *Phombo* begins his performance beating on his drum and uttering his prayers. He calls on the goddess and ancestor spirits to come from Simraungadh. When the goddess and ancestor spirits arrive, he shivers and shakes and announces that the goddess has arrived. Serba rites do not involve sacrifice of animals because *Chyomu* does not eat meat or drink blood. After asking for good fortune and fertility for the clan, the *Phombo*

cuts the *torma* into small pieces and distributes these to clan members and guests. These are eaten along with large amounts of *chang*.

The Serba no longer conduct their clan god rituals. *Chyomu's Phombo* priest who lived in Yersa village died about twenty years ago, at which time the *puja* was terminated.

Conclusions

In traditional Jirel society, the assembly of clansmen to worship their *kul devata* was in fact an overt expression of their common identity as members of their respective descent groups. The act of worshipping clan gods and ancestor spirits is linked to Simraungadh and the elite Kiranti, mentioned in the Hindu epics, *Ramyaana* and *Mahabharata* (cf. Bista 1980:33), whom the Jirel claim as their ancestor.

In addition, these events were a means for families to enhance their status and prestige in the community through the hosting of a large *kul devata* ritual. Because the Jirels are subsistence farmers, only a few households could produce the kind of surplus to host such feasts. Hosting such an event demanded the commitment of considerable amounts of time, effort, and resources, and only rich families were able to afford organizing clan god worship, which they took on as a social obligation.

In the past, the difference between the rich and poor, among the Jirels, and consequently the ability to hold such large feasts, was mostly determined by the amount of landholdings. This excluded everyone but the wealthiest Jirel clansmen from hosting such events. Consequently, it was they who accrued prestige and merit and good karma for undertaking the enterprise. In addition, these *kul devata* rituals also had a significant economic function in the context of traditional Jirel society, i.e., it operated as a mechanism for the reciprocal distribution of the surplus generated by large landholding families. The wealthy obtained merit, prestige, and good karma; and the poor received food; and the clan gods and ancestors were pleased. The clan god rituals thus served as what anthropologists have referred to as a wealth leveling mechanism (cf. Lavenda and Schultz 2000:124).

This form of food distribution in the context of rituals is to be understood in terms of the traditional way of life in agrarian self-sufficient villages of Nepal, as described by Shrestha (1997). In the past, communities such as the Jirels were based on mutual interdependence and a system of reciprocity involving the basic necessities. Certainly economic inequalities did exist, mostly in the ownership or access to land, and those without land depended on the landowners for their existence, working as tenants, sharecroppers, or servants, in a client-patron relationship. This was

certainly a source of tension and stress, but the mutual dependence and sense of community served as a common bond among them. In times of emergency, those who had the means would help those in need. The wealthy hosted rituals, such as the ones described above, during which they shared their resources with the impoverished. Events such as these occurred frequently enough to be an important economic mechanism for redistribution (cf. Shrestha 1997:81).

Traditionally, poverty was seen and treated as a community problem, rather than one associated with individual families, although it was they who bore the brunt of it. With "development," which is largely defined in materialistic terms, involving such indicators as "per capita income," "energy consumption," "resources use," and "literacy," poverty was transformed from a communal or collective problem into one of personal deficiency and individual failure (Shrestha 1997:81; see also Hamill et al., "Some Socio-Cultural Consequences of Transportation Development in the Jiri Valley, Nepal," in this volume).

With the new economic ideology, the wealthy have come to believe that their affluence is the product of their own cleverness and economic rationality, and hence have absolved themselves of any obligations and responsibility toward the poor (Shrestha 1997:81). Currently, in Jiri one is likely to find these "economically rational" folks more ready and willing to invest in satellite dishes and television sets, rather than helping a needy cousin who is unable to afford the cost of the ambulance fee to take a sick child to Kathmandu for treatment. Thus the extinction of clan god worship among the Jirels, marks not just the loss of what someone would call a "quaint cultural tradition," but it is also a profound indicator of changes in the socioeconomic, political, and ideological characteristics of Jirel society as a whole.

Note

1. Although not all of the rites we are about to describe are performed any longer, the present tense will be used for the sake of uniformity. Today few clan elders remain who remember the rituals in all their detail. For this reason, the information presented may appear somewhat cursory and sketchy; however, the data are sufficient enough to reveal the salient features of these rituals.

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PHOMBOS: A LOOK AT TRADITIONAL HEALERS AMONG THE JIRELS OF EASTERN NEPAL

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Introduction

The data presented in this paper were gathered from several Jirel *Phombos*. For comparative purposes, we also interviewed and videotaped the performances of two Sherpa *Jhankris* and one Tamang *Jhankri* living in the Jiri Valley. Our principal informant, however, was Jirel Nir Bahadur, a *Phombo* trained by Pusing Lama, a notable magico-religious practitioner and Lama who died in 1996. In addition to spending long hours conducting interviews and photographing his ritual paraphernalia, we also visited Nir Bahadur's house in Kalang Village (Ward No. 1) on several occasions to see him conduct curing rituals and videotape his performances. These visits often took place late at night, because that is when healing rituals are conducted, and involved traveling some 11 km on foot along treacherous and slippery leech infested paths.

The *Phombo* and his Profession

The role of the *Phombos* in the clan rituals of the Jirels was discussed in detail in "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume. The present paper should be considered an extension of that article. The literature on the *Jhankri* of Nepal and indigenous healers in general is extensive (see Bista 1980: 11, 59, 91, 97, 171; Miller 1997; Hitchcock and Jones 1976; Fournier 1976, see also the volume by Fürer-Haimendorf 1974; the special issue of *Contributions to Nepalese Studies: Anthropology, Health, and Development*, 1976 vol. 3, Rienhard 1976; and Subedi 1989, 1992; Subedi and Subedi 1993; and Subedi et al., 1995). However very little has been written about the Jirel *Phombos* (with the exception of the short article by Williams-Blangero, et al., [1995], which treats the subject indirectly).

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The *Phombos* present an interesting ethnographic variation to the various accounts of Nepal's indigenous healers and spirit masters. For this reason, the discussion will focus on the *Phombos* themselves, how they choose their profession or receive their calling, their world-views or cosmology, and their traditional functions as healers and intermediaries between the natural and supernatural worlds.

The Jirels call the *Phombos* "priests," while others have called them "traditional faith healers" (Miller 1997:1). Neither of these definitions is adequate. While the *Phombos* perform certain priestly, or priest-like, functions, such as leading group rituals in clan *kul devata* worship, they also function very much like shamans in having a direct and personal relationship with the supernatural world. Specifically, they claim to have the ability to call spirits or gods, allow the supernatural beings to take possession of their bodies, and then use the powers of those beings in controlled and restrained ways. This personal linkage with the spirits/gods through the medium of his own body is the key to understanding the *Phombo*, his cosmology, his role in society, and his healing powers.

The term *Phombo* is reminiscent of the name of the Tibetan oracle-priests, the *Bon-po*, who also used drums, became possessed by gods, practiced exorcisms, and acted as healers (Eliade 1964: 177, 432-433). A Tibetan connection between Jirel *Phombos* and the Tibetan *Bon-po* is not unlikely, given the considerable diffusion of cultural elements from Tibet into the Jiri area. This, however, is speculative and pursuing this line of inquiry is beyond the scope of this paper.

Phombo the Jirel Shaman

In the religion paper we referred to the *Phombo* as a shaman. The term "shaman" is thought by some to derive from the word *saman*, or *vaman* (Laufer 1917), used by the Tungus-speaking people of Siberia to refer to a particular type of magico-religious specialist, a part-time practitioner, whose services are sought during times of personal or social crisis. It must be noted, however, that not everyone agrees on this derivation (see Kehoe 1995 for a discussion; see also Voight 1984). The shaman, more popularly known as a "medicine man," is adept at personally communicating with the spiritual world. These practitioners, who play drums, enter into trances, and become possessed with spirits, often serve as healers, diviners, and guardians of the psychic equilibrium of their communities.

In his book, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, Lewis (1971:55) maintains that the control that the practitioner exercises over the spirits incarnated in his body is the essential characteristic of shamanism. Although spirit possession does not necessarily characterize

all shamanistic traditions (cf. Sidky 1999, 1994), this generalization does hold true for the Jirel practitioners. The contact between the *Phombos* and the supernatural world is not only a personal one, but it is as well a controlled one, for the *Phombo* is able to restrain and regulate the foreign and potentially dangerous entities which have taken possession of him. Given these characteristics, the *Phombo* may be considered to be a shaman in the traditional anthropological sense of the term (cf. Miller 1997: 9; Reinhard 1976:16; Sidky 1999).

Shamans are not to be confused with priests, even though they may perform priest-like functions. For example, the *Phombos* did perform such functions, presiding over all rituals—including funerals, marriages, and other life-cycle observances. However, after the Jirels adopted Buddhism, the performance of funeral rites, cremation and last rites (called *ghewa*), held 40 days after the funeral was taken over by the Lamas. Still *Phombos* have retained their other priestly duties.

Following a typical anthropological definition "a priest is usually part of a larger religious establishment, is more concerned with the conduct of group ritual and derives his relation with supernatural powers by virtue of his office within [an ecclesiastical establishment]. The shaman, to the contrary, is usually an individual practitioner, and his contact with the supernatural world is personal and immediate" (Murphy 1989: 203).

Two important points may be made here: first, a priest is confined and constrained by a formal hierarchical organization; and second, he derives his authority from the office he occupies within that hierarchy. The *Phombo* is free from such constraints. So far as we were able to discern, *Phombos* lack a hierarchical organization, aside from a master/disciple relationship, which may last for brief intervals when a *Phombo* accepts as his guru (spiritual guide) a practitioner who possesses some special knowledge. Others deny that they have any gurus at all, claiming that their knowledge is obtained directly from their helping spirits. Thus, even that master/disciple relationship is absent in some cases.

***Phombos* and Lamas**

Interestingly, Jirel Lamas have drawn on some of the practices and beliefs of the *Phombos*. Whether this is a unique syncretism, or whether it reflects inherent shamanistic elements in Tibetan Lamaism, the existence of which has been suggested by Eliade (1964: 433-435), is unclear. One of the most famous Jirel Lamas, Pusing Lama (d. 1996) was at first a *Phombo*, but later in his career underwent training to become a Buddhist priest. This was confirmed to us by his son, who is now himself a practicing Lama and a healer. It is said that Pusing Lama incorporated elements of both traditions

in his professional repertoire (cf. Williams-Blangero et al., 1995). Moreover, as noted in the paper "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume, we encountered at least one practicing *Phombo* who was personally trained by Pusing Lama, after the latter himself had abandoned his old profession.

Some Jirel Lamas do act as healers uttering mantras (incantations), and blowing blessings, referred to as *phukphak*, and prescribing herbal medicines. One Jirel Lama, the son of the late Pusing Lama also dispenses charms, called *buti*, (a small packet containing magical substances worn around the patient's neck), and owns an elaborate assemblage of ritual paraphernalia and magical substances for this purpose. These are identical to those that are used by Jirel *Phombos* as ingredients to be placed inside the *buti*: They include human bones, wolf bones (*phara*), bear claws (*thome*), parts of a musk deer (*kasturi*), tiger skulls (*chen*), rhino bones (*gaida*), mongoose bodies (*neuri-musa*), python skin (*rulbo*), dried wasps (*yuwa*), pieces of rope with which someone committed suicide (Jirel term unknown), grasshopper cocoons (*abiganga*), and a yeti skull (*yeti*).

One of the differences between the Lama's *buti* and that of the *Phombo*'s, is that the former wraps the magical ingredients in paper rubbings taken from carved wooden blocks containing Buddhist texts, while the *Phombos* do not. Moreover, it should be noted that the list of items given here are perhaps not representative of all Jirel Lamas, as it was obtained from the son of Pusing Lama, who was a *Phombo* of great renown, and passed on much of his knowledge to his son.

In comparing the collection of magical substances owned by the Lamas with those carried by the *Phombos*, there is one notable item missing from the list given above. This item is found among the medicines of the *Phombo*, and is the skull of *Ri Phombo*, or "forest *Phombo*," called "*Ban Jhankri*" in Nepali. These are beings that are said to live in the forest, steal children and train them to become *Phombos* (cf. Miller 1997:21). Our *Phombo* informant said that he places scrapings of the magically potent skull inside the *butis*, which he makes for his patients who are especially in danger of magical assault.

A major distinction between the Lama and the *Phombo* is that, unlike the latter, the Lama does not enter into a trance or undergo spirit possession. Lamas acquire their position through study and usually teach the profession to their sons. A person becomes a *Phombo*, on the other hand, when a god, goddess, or spirit of an ancestor enters into his body compelling him to take up the profession. The physical manifestation of such spirit possession is the characteristic shivering or trembling. The shivering is at first uncontrollable but the *Phombo* eventually learns to

bring this trembling under control. On several occasions, while observing *Phombo* performances, we noted certain individuals in the audience shivering uncontrollably, their condition being induced by the pounding of the drum and the presence of the spirits beckoned by the *Phombo*. Their shaking was so unmanageable that they were unable to stand or walk. Later we found that these were students studying for the profession, but as yet had not mastered the ability to control the shaking and shivering characteristic of spirit possession.

When a person is "called" for the profession, the shivering reoccurs and may be accompanied by a major psychological crisis that can last for some time. The *Phombo* from the Serba clan noted that it was the spirit of his grandfather, himself a practitioner of great renown, that first entered into his body and thus caused his shivering. When this happened, he said, "I was senseless and like a madman. I also lost my power of speech. After five years I could speak again, and realized that I was to become a *Phombo*. I then went to Pusing Lama, offered him much *chang*, and asked him to teach me the mantras and how to use the drum and the bell belts."

Once a possessed individual is able to control the shivering, he gains divine powers and can assume the role of a *Phombo*. Such control is achieved either as a result of the tutelage of the spirits or gods, or more frequently through instructions from an existing practitioner.

The spirit intrusion that transforms a person into a *Phombo* is different from demonic possession, which is attributed to the action of noxious and pathogenic supernatural entities. Also, if one *Phombo* sends a god or spirit to enter the body of another *Phombo*, which happens during periodic psychic battles between practitioners, the latter will become ill and may even die, unless he takes countermeasures.

One informant described his subjective impressions when possessed: "this state is like a dream. We can see what is good and what is bad; we can see gods, goddesses, the spirits of our ancestors, and demons. We feel brave and strong and sense that we can defeat anyone." While possessed, the *Phombos* will speak for the spirits inside them. They say that they are aware of what people say and ask of them, but do not always hear everything.

One of the "miracles" that these practitioners sometime perform while "possessed" is to drink flaming mustard oil in small metal cups (*dupati*). If they were to do this while in a normal state, they claim, it will severely burn their mouths and throats. The first time a *Phombo* drinks *dupati* is when his teacher is convinced that he has mastered the spirits and has learned all the necessary mantras and rituals. As a test of his disciple's powers, the teacher asks the student to drink seven cups of burning oil. If

the student succeeds without being burned, he then becomes a professional practitioner.

Each *Phombo* has his own particular gods and goddesses, whom he specially reveres. For example, the *Phombo* of the Serba clan worships the goddess *Papachernji*, in addition to his own clan god, *Chyomu* (see Sidky et al., "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume). Furthermore, all *Phombos* worship *Mahadi* (*Mahadev*, Lord Shiva) and the goddess *Bhagabati*. One *Phombo* explained this as follows: "The Mahadi was himself a *Phombo*, the original one, and in the past he used to perform the services of the *Phombo* for everyone. It was Mahadi who also created the *Ri Phombo*, or *Ban Jhankri*, as his first disciple and to cure the God when he himself became ill. But now, in this present age, the gods have turned into stone statues and so their spirits must now enter into the body of humans. What *Mahadi* used to do, is now done by humans, whose bodies become the receptacle for the spirit of the god. As for *Bhagabati*, she is a powerful goddess and she sometimes appears in our dreams and instructs us to perform certain tasks. If she happens to enter into our body when we are reciting our mantras, we gain divine power and become especially powerful. When she is in our body she will speak with her own voice."

The Functions of the Phombo

The *Phombo* treads where neither doctor nor priest are able to do so. The priest utters prayers and makes offerings to supernatural beings, the doctor administers pills, but the *Phombo* sets foot into the invisible world, the juncture between the realm of humans and the world of the spirits (gods, goddesses, ghosts, nature spirits, demons), from whence emanate unexpected and uncontrolled intrusions into the lives of people, resulting in calamities, sickness, and disharmony. The *Phombo's* task is to control and divert those intrusions (cf. Miller 1997: 261).

A wide array of spirits, evil agencies, and individuals with the power to cause harm by magical means, are thought to intrude into the lives of people, wrecking havoc and misfortunes. One of these evil agencies are the *boksi* who are evil women who cause sickness by using invisible powers. One *Phombo* described the *boksi* as follows: "These are living women. They are the opposite of the *Phombos*. This is because when anyone suffers from evil spirits the *Phombo* drives those spirits away. But the *boksi* makes the evil powers even stronger and makes them enter into the body of people. When such women are dissatisfied with anyone they will send an evil spirit into them. Sometimes the victims become dumb, some experience terrible headaches, others vomit blood and die. When the *boksi*

become envious, their powers become operative. Often in a village there are more *boksi* than there are *Phombos*. These *boksi* are malicious, noxious, and evil creatures. They conduct ceremonies late at night, place candles on their heads and go to special temples to worship at midnight and they sacrifice their husbands like goats."

There are many that believe in the maleficent powers of these *boksi*. The following incident, which took place in Jire while we were conducting fieldwork there, is revealing. Late one rainy afternoon in June, 1999, a Sherpa man came walking up to the Jiri police post. He was drenched and covered in blood and carried the severed head of an old woman in one hand, and in the other carried a large *Khukuri* (the curved Gurkha Nepali knife). He had come to the police to surrender. Upon seeing this horrific scene, the poor fellow on duty was so shaken that he was unable to put a cartridge into the chamber of his rifle in order to stop the knife-wielding man. Finally, one of the officers had to intervene, grabbing the rifle, loading it, and then capturing the Sherpa man.

In the investigation that followed, it was revealed that the man believed that the old woman was a *boksi* using her magic to de-stabilize his mind. He had also wanted to kill the old woman's daughter, whom he also suspected of doing evil magic; but he had been unable to locate her. Instead, he killed her goat that was tied outside her door.

The *boksi* are the enemies of the *Phombos*. They will strike out, it is said, so *Phombos* must protect themselves with mantras. Like the witch, in the ethnographic literature, the *boksi* do not actually exist; they are merely a figure of belief and myth (see Sidky 1997), but the belief functions to explain various misfortunes. By blaming conflicts and problems, such as psychosomatic illnesses due to interpersonal conflicts, on these imaginary noxious figures, the *Phombo* depersonalizes and diffuses them. All of the *Phombos* we spoke to claim that they know the identities of the *boksi* living in their villages; but none would point one out, stating that identifying these agents of evil would lead to retaliations and would cause social disharmony.

Another genus of evil entity, with which the *Phombo* must contend, is the *Bir Masan*. These creatures are demons. *Bir Masan* frequent cremation grounds and riverbanks, sometimes taking on the shape of horses, pigs, or humans who lack faces (called *Murkutta* in the latter form). If a person comes across such beings late at night he will be attacked. Some *boksi* enter into compacts with *Bir Masan* and offer them a special *puya* in return for supernatural powers; and some evil *Jhankris* may also have a special *puya* with a *Bir Masan*, offering them sacrifice. Similarly, in return, they obtain additional supernatural powers.

The *Bir Masan* are said to be exceptionally dangerous evil spirits. They roam at night through the villages, galloping on horses. They throw stones at people's houses and make strange sounds, as if someone were walking around the house. There are numerous types of *Bir Masans*, and they often vary in color. Some are black—while others are green. When one of these creatures encounters a person face-to-face, they will engulf him. The victim will feel unbearable pain in his body, vomit blood, and will die if not treated immediately. The Jirels believe that if a *Bir Masan* attacks from a long distance, the victim will become weak, lose his appetite, and eventually die.

One informant told us of how such supernatural assaults can occur: "when we go to the forest all of a sudden something hurts, or you feel as if a thing has entered your body that is how you know that a spirit has attacked you. Modern doctors cannot cure you of these afflictions. In fact, the doctor's medicine, will make your condition worse. So we go to the *Phombo*. He then tells us the cause of our sickness and what to do about it." A *Phombo* can kill a *Bir Masan* by using two tiger bones, which represent the "right hand of Kali," or a magical spear, called a *barsa* (see below).

The restless ghosts of individuals who were not given proper burial comprises another type of harmful supernatural beings, called *Pichas*, *Chorla*, and *Bayu*, depending on their caste. They are restless, they haunt houses, and enter into peoples' bodies causing unbearable heart pain. This is an illness that physicians are unable to cure. Only *Phombos* can see these beings, and only after midnight, because that is when evil spirits become active. This is why *Phombos* always perform their healing rituals at night. To cure afflicted people, the *Phombo* makes offerings to the gods and inquires why the ghosts are causing trouble and asks what will appease them. The *Phombo* then directs the patient to perform the appropriate procedures, such as offering a sacrifice.

Finally, other sources of calamity and disease are the gods and goddesses themselves. Offending *Loo* or *Naya* (see Sidky et al., "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume), or any one of the multitudes of deities can lead to illness or death. Here again, people resort to the aid of the *Phombo*, who must determine which god or goddess was offended, why, and how the situation is to be rectified. Most often the gods will demand a sacrifice before they can be placated.

As one practitioner said, "*Phombos* are like doctors, we treat people who are suffering from spirits, in other words, those who are stricken with

illnesses that are of a supernatural origin. We do it with mantras, herbal medicine, and the help of our own spirits."

The Jirel tell of a most famous *Phombo*, Bikasim, who could do amazing things, which, according to our informants, no other *Phombo* was able to accomplish. The following is a description of one of his encounters with a *boksi*, related to us by an elderly informant. The account provides interesting insights into the operational procedures of the *Phombos*. It was said that a *boksi* had attacked a small child, damaging his liver. The child's parents took the little boy to a famous *Jhankri* (Nepali faith healer or shaman). The *boksi* and the *Jhankri* then entered into a psychic battle using mantras. The *Jhankri* failed and was killed by the *boksi*. Then the boy's parents went to a second *Jhankri*. He also failed and died for his efforts. Finally the parents sought out Bikasim. His method of diagnosis was to feel the boy's pulse, rather than asking him questions. By this means he immediately determined the identity of the *boksi*. He used holy water and turmeric as part of his cure, and his mantras were so powerful that the *boksi* died and the boy was saved. It is said that this Bikasim could make people faint with just a whistle. "There are Jirel *Phombos* nowadays," our informant told us, "but never has there been one like Bikasim."

This account also reveals that the *Phombo* relies heavily on his reputation for the successful cures he has accomplished in the past. This reputation gives him legitimacy and authority.

The Phombo's Healing Performance

The *Phombo* claims to have a direct and personal relationship with the supernatural world. He compels the noxious and pathogenic supernatural entities which afflict the patient to identify themselves, for he is the master of spirits, and unlike his patient, is not mastered by these evil agencies (cf. Miller 1997:261).

We must view the role of the *Phombo* in terms of how sickness is conceptualized. In Jiri, as elsewhere in the hills of Nepal, poverty, absence of basic modern medical infrastructure, isolation, and lack of education have impeded the diffusion of the Western scientific viewpoint about illness and disease. Illness and misfortune are presumed to be due to the intrusion of spirits and demons (see Tausig et al., "Mental Illness in Jiri, Nepal," in this volume). The way to remedy such illnesses is therefore to seek out the services of men who tremble, men who are the master of spirits, the *Phombos*.

In order to make contact with the spirit world, the *Phombo* employs a variety of ritual objects and procedures. The *nga* (*dhyangro* in Nepali) is a

double-headed drum with a single handle carved with images of various gods. This drum, which is beaten with a stick, called a *nagading*, has been ritually dedicated to the gods and goddesses. Our informants noted that the drum is used to communicate with the supernatural entities and the *Phombo* conveys the divine words to the people while pounding the instrument. Chimes (*jhaurta*), which resemble small cymbals, are used to let the spirits know that the *Phombo* is present. He also possesses a *barsa*, or magical spear. This spear must be made from the metal of a *Khukuri* knife (*thue* in Jirel) and a sickle (*hashiya*) obtained from a cremation ground, where normally the property of a dead person is buried after his body is cremated. It is thought that this metal, which has been obtained from holy ground, possesses magical properties. This is the weapon used to kill the *Bir Masan*, who often frequent cremation grounds. Two different bladed weapons, called *kurmi* and *burba* (*phurba* in Nepali) are used as the main defense against the evil spirits and supernatural attacks by other *Phombos*. Finally, the *Phombo* wears beads, called *tehenga*, and a belt of bells. When the *Phombo* is shivering, the bells ring constantly and are said to ward off evil spirits.

The healing ceremony always takes place late at night and can last anywhere from a few hours to the entire night. It takes place inside the *Phombo's* house. The atmosphere is highly charged, with the patient's family and neighbors assembled together in one room demonstrating their concern for the sick individual. The *Phombo's* assistant heats the drum over a central hearth to make the skin taut, while the *Phombo* himself dons his ritual apparel. This comprises a long pleated white shirt, about ankle length, along with beads, bells, and a head-dress, which consists of five sections, each bearing the image of a Buddhist deity. In contrast the *Jhankri* head-dresses are usually made up of porcupine quills or peacock feathers held in a cloth band. The *Phombo* then lights incense, places his weapons on the ground, and sets up an altar, which includes human bones, crystals, statues of gods and goddess, an offering of uncooked rice, a container of *chang*, deer horns, and a special vessel called a *bumbo*. The *bumbo* is a receptacle which contains holy water and flowers. According to our informant, the ritual use of *bumbo* is unique to the *Phombo's* repertoire, and does not appear in the practices of Nepali *Jhankris*.

Then the *Phombo* offers *chang* to the gods and begins to pound his drum and prays to the clan god, *Chyomu*, and his own god, *Papachernji*, as well as invoking the spirits of the ancestors for help, while chanting in a high-pitched voice. His assistant plays the chimes. All the while the *Phombo* pounds his drum with an increasing tempo. He begins to shiver and tremble violently, making the bells he wears ring loudly. Now in a deep trance-like

state, and sweating profusely, the *Phombo* is believed to be possessed by supernatural beings, ancestral spirits, or particular deities. Once possessed, he begins to shake and shiver even more violently, this being the tangible manifestation that the gods or spirits have entered into his body. The *Phombo* incarnates the spirits and deities, but is also able to control and restrain them. He then communicates with these gods, who may speak through him, and compels the noxious spirits to reveal their identity and the reasons why they are afflicting the patient.

The *Phombo* then rises up and starts to dance still beating his drum and moving around the room in a counter-clockwise fashion. Usually after about an hour of chanting and beating, with periodic breaks to take a sip of *chang* and a mouthful of chewing tobacco, he sits down by the altar and asks that the patient be brought next to him. He then relates to the patient the cause of his or her troubles. (In one case we observed, the patient was told that she had neglected to offer a sacrifice she had promised to make at one of the shrines. After this he instructed the patient to fulfill her obligation to the gods.) Then the *Phombo* makes the patient drink some of the holy water from the *bumbo*, which he then places upon his own head. Standing up, he again dances around the room for another hour or so, chanting all the while, balancing the vessel on his head. Using mantras he magically ensures that the *bumbo* does not fall off as he dances. He then magically transfers the essence of the supernatural cause into this vessel, and thus effects the cure.

One common feature of the healing sessions that we were able to observe, was that often the patients emerged from the experience emotionally and psychologically benefited. Even if not physically cured, although such miraculous cures have been known to take place, the patients seem to be at least psychologically in a better state to fight whatever ails them.

***Phombos* and Modern Doctors**

The *Phombos* call themselves "doctors," and we were curious to find out their attitudes towards modern medicine. One practitioner explained his views: "When a patient comes to me I will conduct *jokhana herne mo tachyate*, a spiritual diagnosis. Usually the illness is caused by evil spirits or the harmful magic of others. It may produce heartburn, headaches, itching all over the body, dizziness, tingling sensations on the four limbs, light or heavy headedness, and nightmares involving deceased people. If my diagnosis reveals a supernatural cause, then I will proceed with treatment. If not, I will refer the patient to a doctor. Also, if a bodily ailment fails to respond to my repeated attempts to cure it, I will send the patient to a physician. Problems that we cannot cure are those that involve physical

damage to the body, such as broken legs, severed limbs and cuts. These patients must seek modern medical treatment."

Jirel Views Regarding the *Phombos*

Although many Jirels resort to the *Phombos*, they also rely upon the limited modern medical facilities available to them. A few individuals, however, are a bit skeptical about the healing abilities of the *Phombos*. Two elderly informants remarked: "You get sick. You go to the *Phombo*. He tells you a *boksi* made you sick, or a ghost, or a *Bir Masan*. This is what the *Phombo* tells us. We don't see these things. We've never seen a *boksi*, or a ghost, or a *Bir Masan*. We don't believe or trust them [the *Phombos*]. Besides, you can never tell if you are cured or not. They make money from their services, and they ask for rice, chickens, *raksi* [a distilled alcoholic drink]. We must give them the best food. The sick person may be almost dead, but they want the best food, otherwise they get mad."

Miller (1997: 264), noted that sometimes skepticism may be expressed to anthropologists during interviews, but in practice this incredulity melts away, and the *Phombo* (or *Jhankri*) is called upon often, because in the hills of Nepal, he is the people's doctor.

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PRELIMINARY ETHNOSEMANTICS OF THE AVIFAUNA VOCABULARY IN JIREL

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Introduction

In the summer of 1999 three of the co-authors of this paper formed a team to conduct ethnographic research among the Jirel people of eastern Nepal. The Jirels are one of 70 or so ethnic groups in Nepal and occupy a valley that carries their name, the Jiri Valley, about 190 kilometers east of Kathmandu. Very little ethnographic information has been recorded about the Jirels. Therefore, our primary goal for the initial research season was to begin the basic process of describing Jirel culture. Research time was limited to a brief field season, so we recognized that an ethnographic depth sufficient for contribution to important theoretical issues first required a reasonably good ethnographic description. Consequently, we focused on this basic ethnographic task and set out to characterize aspects of the culture, such as its social organization, subsistence patterns, religion, language, and politics.

In the linguistic portion of the research specifically, we sought to describe the basic referential ranges of lexemes, the things that go with words (Frake 1969), in as many semantic domains as possible. We were able to collect information in four principle domains: (1) kin terms, (2) objects associated with the kitchen, (3) macro-environmental zones, and (4) birds. In preparation for our fieldwork dealing with ethnosemantics (described below), we focused on the bird domain and in-depth ethnosemantic information was collected in that area. Additional information was collected for other aspects of the research, such as kin terms, and the other domains mentioned above.

Ethnographic Background

The Jirels are a relatively small ethnic group estimated to be only 3,525 individuals in 1985 (Blangero 1987). Geographically, they live in

approximately nine villages, all of which are located in the Jiri region. Some ethnohistorical researchers have suggested that the Jirels are the descendents of a mating between a Sunwar woman and a Sherpa man (Fournier 1974). This hypothesis has support in the quantitative genetic study done by Blangero (1987). It is clear that Jirel culture is closely related to that of the Sunwars (Bista 1980). Both Jirel and Sunwar may be seen as belonging to a larger ethnic grouping known as the Kiranti (Fournier 1974).

Both Hindus and non-Hindus speak the national language of Nepal, i.e., Nepali, which is classified as an Indo-European language. These Hindus, who include the Brahmans and Chhetris, represent the traditional Hindu priestly and warrior high castes, with a long history. Brahmans and Chhetris first came to the Jiri region during the military expansion of King Prithvi Narayana Shah in the late 18th century (Fournier 1974). They are the wealthiest ethnic groups in the Jiri region. Chhetris predominate numerically, comprising approximately 37% of the population of the Dolakha District, in which the Jiri Valley is situated (Frank 1974).

The Jirels, Sherpas, Sunwars, and the Tamangs, all of whom inhabit the eastern hills of Nepal, practice group endogamy and speak Tibeto-Burman languages. Culturally, the Sherpas are very similar to the peoples of Tibet, and the languages and religions of these two groups are also very similar. This most probably is due to the Sherpas' relatively recent arrival into Nepal from Tibet, approximately 500 years ago (Fürer-Haimendorf 1964).

The Tamangs are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nepal and are probably of Tibetan origin (Bista 1980). These people are to be found throughout much of Nepal. The Tamangs are also located in the western portion of the Jiri area.

The Sunwars are a relatively small group, numbering some 20,000 individuals. The Sunwars live throughout the area (Fournier 1974, 1978). Their traditional tribal lands have been slowly lost to other groups, and they no longer own major landholds in the Jiri Valley (Fournier 1974, 1978). Also, they are becoming rapidly Hinduized, increasingly relying on Brahmans, rather than their own traditional priests, for the conduct of many of their religious ceremonies (Fournier 1974, 1978). The Sunwar language has been classified as belonging to the East Himalayish language grouping of the Tibeto-Burman languages (Glover 1970).

Most scholars agree that Jirel should be included in the Sino-Tibetan language family. But there is little agreement as to the internal structure of that language family, or on the place of its specific languages, including Jirel. Most language scholars dealing with the area agree that Jirel is one of the Tibeto-Burman group that is similar to Karen in the Tibeto-Karen sub-family of Sino-Tibetan languages (Benedict 1972; Matisoff 1978). Not all

linguists agree with the classification stated above. For example, Shafer (1940; 1955) disagrees with the whole idea of a Tibeto-Burman group, and whether it is a sub-family of Sino-Tibetan, or if it belongs to a lower order class. He appears to place Jirel, although not explicitly, in the Bodic division of Sino-Tibetan. In general it is difficult to disagree with Matisoff (1978:1) when he states that: "...one is not suffused with any delicious sense of certainty about the fine details of the interrelationships of the hundreds of the TB [Tibeto-Burman] languages."

Clearly, the placement of Jirel in these classifications is problematic because comparatively little has been published on the language. In this research we made extensive use of an unpublished Jirel-Napali-English dictionary which has been compiled over the past several decades by Anita Maibaum and Ester Strahm, both associated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. These two field researchers have published a few descriptions of limited aspects of the Jirel language, such as discourse rules (Maibaum, 1978), a tagmemic description of Jirel clauses (Strahm 1975), and a word list (Maibaum and Strahm 1973). No general descriptive grammar of the language is available. Therefore, the classification of Jirel as Tibeto-Burman or Bodic, or whatever, relies on descriptions of closely related languages such as Sherpa (Glover 1974).

The Jirel people are organized into patrilineal clans and sub-clans. These clans function primarily to regulate marriage through an extension of the incest prohibition to all clan mates. The incest prohibition extends on both sides of the family to include first cousins. These clans do not include corporate lineages, and in recent years access to wealth and the means of producing wealth are individually owned. The expressed ideal post-nuptial residence pattern is neolocal, but many newly married couples reside with the groom's family until they become self-sufficient. Polygyny is permitted, but extremely rare. Of all the Jirel men in the valley only two, both of whom are wealthy by local standards, had multiple wives. One of those had two wives, and the other five.

Jirel kinship terminology is Iroquoian for the first ascending generation but is otherwise Hawaiian for all others. The kin terminology system also incorporates a relative age feature for the first ascending generation, and ego's own generations. Ego's parents' siblings and ego's siblings and cousins are similarly marked for their relative ages (for a more complete description of Jirel social organization, see Sidky et al., "Social Organization, Economy, and Kinship Among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume)

The Jirels practice a mixed subsistence pattern of horticulture supplemented by animal husbandry. Both land and animals are individually

owned. The principle crops are millet and corn (maize), and they keep cows, goats, pigs, and buffalo as well as chickens. National Nepali law prevents the use of cattle for meat, so bovines are used as a source of dairy products and as draft animals. The other animals are slaughtered for meat, which is consumed directly or typically preserved by drying.

Recent improvements in the infrastructure, financed by the Swiss government, have added marginally to the subsistence alternatives open to the Jirel people. A paved road that runs between Katmandu and the Jiri Valley has been constructed and is on the route to Mount Everest Base Camp. This road has allowed a small tourist industry to develop, and several retail stores catering to these visitors are now functioning. A few Jiri people participate in the operation of these businesses as well as in the operation of a cheese factory. Much of this involvement in the developing cash economy of Nepal, however, has been dominated by the Hindu castes, as well as people of other ethnic groups who have migrated into the valley following the construction of the road.

Principles of Folk Biological Classification

Beginning in the mid-1950s some anthropologists began to study the relationship between human society and thought. This research agenda came to be known as "cognitive anthropology." The first concerns of cognitive anthropology concentrated on the cultural content of the meanings of words, but these early interests evolved to include questions concerning general interactions of mental processes (such as memory, emotion, and reasoning), with cultural knowledge, that is, not merely what people know, but how they use that knowledge and pass it on to subsequent generations (D'Andrede 1995: xiii-xiv). In this work there was an early interest in documenting coherent word lists or lexicons, and that was of most interest to the work reported here.

Early in their work cognitive anthropologists discovered that different lexicons required different approaches to represent their meaning. Some lexicons are relatively small, in the range of 50 to 100 words, and are best represented as a concatenation of the features of meaning that distinguish the elements of the lexicon, a so-called componential analysis. One example of a common small lexicon is the kinship terms that often form the core of social organization. Other lexicons are much larger, in the range of 500-to-1000 words. They exhibit properties of meaning, such as "X is a kind of Y," that are common to all human languages. Many of these lexicons are the words people use to refer to living things (plants and animals) and are referred to in the literature as "folk taxonomies." Research on these folk taxonomies began with the earliest interests in cognitive anthropology and

continues to this day. One of the earliest studies of this sort was done by Conklin (1954) among the Hanunóo of the Philippines, whose plant lexicon contains over 1500 hierarchically arranged terms.

Most of the work on folk taxonomies since the 1950s has gone in one of two directions using either the "taxonomic hierarchy model" or the "natural core model" (Hunn 1982: 835). Berlin (1990) referred to these two as the "intellectual" model and the "utilitarian" model, respectively. The intellectual model, which is probably the more dominant approach, concentrates on the linguistic structure of the folk taxonomy itself and assumes that the lexicon is organized along strict lines of inclusion and exclusion. The utilitarian model questions whether the taxonomy is a rigid structure characterized by fixed ranks and "envisions folk biological domains as composed of a general purpose, polythetic core of taxa surrounded by special purpose monothetic concepts in peripheral positions" (Hunn 1982: 835). In this model the domain may be seen as a series of crosscutting groups, based on attributes, such as mode of reproduction or diet (Hunn 1976).

Both schools of thought start with some basic assumptions about folk taxonomies and their underlying structure. First described by Berlin, Breedlove, and Raven (1973), these general principles identify five or six levels, each of which forms a rank in the taxonomic hierarchy model. All folk taxonomies specify lexical and semantic characteristics of each level. These characteristics include the lexemic status of the taxon, whether it is a primary or a secondary lexeme, and its range of reference, that is, whether it is more or less polymorphic. Primary lexemes are one or more word phrases that cannot be productively analyzed (for example "oak" or "lion" in contemporary English). Secondary lexemes are multi-word expressions in which one element of the phrase makes reference to the next higher node in the taxonomy (for example "white oak" in contemporary English).

The Unique Beginner occupies the top node of the taxonomy at Level 0, for example, "plant" or "animal" in contemporary American English. It begins the taxonomy but quite often there is no overt label for this node. At Level 1, Life Forms are polytypic primary lexemes that are immediately included in the "Unique Beginner." "Fish," "bird," and "reptile" are Life Form examples in contemporary English. These taxa are typically few in number and rarely exceed five words in reported folk taxonomies. Sometimes Generic taxa from Level 2 are elevated to Level 1 when they are of particular ritual or economic significance in a culture. Generic taxa are primary lexemes that are immediately included in other primary lexemes usually at the Life Form level. They are significantly less polytypic than the Life Form taxa. For example, there is wide variation in the class of

"trees" but much less in the class of "oaks." They are numerous and are commonly in the range of 500 words. They are considered the core of the classification system. Level 3 Varietal taxa are relatively rare secondary lexemes that are included in primary lexemes. Generic taxa and Specific taxa at Level 4 are rarer than Varietals and are secondary lexemes. A sixth rank, called "Intermediate," occurs in some folk taxonomies between the Life Form and Generic levels. "Pine" in English has been cited as an example of an Intermediate taxon (D'Andrede 1995: 97).

In the folk classification literature, both schools of thought employ these principles but in different ways. The taxonomic hierarchy school takes the principles to be well established and use them as the basis for further research. Brown (1977, 1979), for example, has done extensive research on the evolution of "Life Form" taxa in various languages. Healey (1993: 19-34) has used this model to investigate the correspondence between the folk classification system and mythology for birds of paradise in highland New Guinea. Medeiros Costa-Neto used the principles as a starting point for his discussion of the cultural significance of bees and wasps among the Pankararé in northeastern Brazil (1998: 1-13). This continued extensive use demonstrates the importance of the taxonomic hierarchy model.

The natural core scholars, on the other hand, often employ the Berlin, Breedlove, and Raven (1973) principles in discussing the advantages of their perspective in accounting for folk classification data. Randall (1976: 545-546), for example, reports that the Samal have a Life Form taxon, *kayu* (tree), whose meaning is a blend of both morphological and functional meaning features (a plant with good wood for cooking, houses, and boats). The taxonomic hierarchy model allows only morphological meaning features (for example tree) while functional features (good wood for cooking, houses, and boats) are permissible as part of the natural core of meaning for a taxon. Hunn and French (1984: 73-92) also make use of the Berlin, Breedlove, and Raven model in an explicit argument from Sahaptin against taxonomic hierarchy. They report that Sahaptin exhibits little taxonomic hierarchy, especially in the realm of Specific and Varietal Taxa. They describe three nomenclature patterns, one of which resembles the class inclusion characteristic of the taxonomic hierarchy model, while the other two draw relations of coordination (for example "relative" or "friend of") between taxa.

The debate between scholars who follow the taxonomic hierarchy model and those who follow the natural core model is of fundamental importance for our understanding of culture and humanity, since it is a debate over the nature of the human mind, and because it is a debate about the human mind, wherein culture resides, it is a debate the nature of culture. It is also one of

those issues in social science that make anthropology a "hard" science, as opposed to an "easy" science like physics or chemistry (Hamill 1990: 14). At present there is no single piece of evidence that will decide the issue. Rather it will be decided only with an accumulation of evidence from languages and cultures around the world that shows which model, if either, provides the better understanding of people and their cultures. It is because reports on previously unreported languages, such as Jirel, provide new evidence and deepen our comprehension of the issues that makes them important.

Data Collection

The ethnosemantic information reported here was collected as part of a collaborative research project among the Jirels. The research goals included collecting base-line information and describing Jirel culture in terms of its social organization, subsistence patterns, religion and ritual, ethno-medical practices, and language with a focus on meaning systems. The research team collected data in all of these areas and also made extensive use of data which had been collected in a separate long-term bio-medical research project designed to study the genetics of susceptibility to helmenthic infections among the Jirels.

Time limitations forced some modification of typical ethnographic methods. Under ideal conditions, anthropologists have the luxury of time to elicit their information and check its accuracy. In typical folk taxonomy research, for example, the researcher may spend months with consultants investigating the local environment, identifying and naming the local plants and animals, and categorizing them according to culturally significant principles.

These limitations were, of course, known prior to the start of the research project, hence some accommodations were made. For the ethnosemantic portion of the study, an attempt was made to use available resources that described the local environment in order to reduce the amount of time that would normally be necessary to identify and name the real biotic features. An attempt was made to produce a relatively complete set of pictorial representations, i.e., photographs and drawings of a group of plants or animals reported as having been found in the local Jiri environment. These were used as a stimulus set instead of real objects. This set was prepared for presentation to local consultants for them to name and group. In general, most of the biotic environment was, however, like the Jiri people themselves, minimally reported in the literature. However, ornithological research carried on over the past century has resulted in very good documentation of the avifauna of Nepal, including that of the Jiri

Valley. Library research in the fall of 1998 through the spring of 1999 produced a relatively exhaustive set of pictures of local birds that were eventually used for this portion of the research project.

Inskipp and Inskipp (1985) provided the information for the first step in the process. Their *Guide to the Birds of Nepal* (1985: 87) divides the country into squares of about 0.5 degrees longitude and latitude, approximately 54 km, on each side. Each species reported for Nepal in the literature was then identified for each of the demarcated territories in which it had been observed. From this, a master list of over 300 species of birds reported in the Jiri Valley as well as the surrounding area was developed.

The second step in the process involved locating pictures of the birds identified in the first step. This was accomplished with the use of Ali and Ripley's ten volume *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1968 through 1974). The reference contains extensive series of color plates from which pictures of birds were copied with the use of a scanner. The color plates in Ali and Ripley provided pictures of 243 of the birds identified in Inskipp and Inskipp (1985). Two sets of pictures were printed on a high-resolution printer and laminated for durability and field use. Before fieldwork began, each bird picture was recorded on a spreadsheet and cross-referenced with both its common English and scientific names. Where Ali and Ripley disagreed with Inskipp and Inskipp on the scientific names, a cross-reference made use of the more recent Inskipp and Inskipp classification scheme.

Once in the field, the elicitation process used these pictures in an iterative, two step process. In the first step, consultants were asked to review the entire set of 243 pictures and sort out the ones with which they were familiar, and then name all of those that they could. In the second step, consultants were asked to group those that they recognized and, when possible, to provide a name for the groupings created. Each name provided was recorded using standard Nepali spelling conventions. Almost all of the elicitation sessions were conducted in a group setting in which two or three consultants would examine the pictures and discuss them, before deciding on a final name or grouping. Each step in the process was repeated with the consultant group until the master set was sorted to everyone's satisfaction and all of the names were agreed upon.

While this elicitation process did shorten the normal time required to gather this type of information, several problems in using it emerged during the course of the research. These should be taken into account when evaluating the data. One problem was with the pictures themselves. It was

found that most of the Jirel people who are still knowledgeable about local birds and the names for them in the Jirel language are older and often have failing eyesight. The Nepali economy and healthcare system make eyeglasses prohibitively expensive for most rural people. Of all the consultants who participated in this part of the research, only one wore glasses. As a result most complained during the elicitation session that some of the pictures were difficult to see with clarity.

A second problem involved the interplay of language and writing. It is not uncommon in the Jiri Valley for people to be at least tri-lingual and tri-literate in Nepali, Jirel, and English. Many of the Nepali speakers report that they are able to participate in Hindi conversations and enjoy mass media broadcasts in Hindi as well. While this fact made recording the data easy, the use of local writing skills also obscured much of the inner workings of the Jirel language in this semantic domain. The local spelling conventions make use of the Roman alphabet as adapted for Nepali, but Nepali and Jirel are very different languages. Nepali is an Indo-European language very closely related to Hindi. Jirel is a Tibeto-Burman language that is much more highly inflected than Nepali. It makes phonemic use of tone, whereas Nepali does not. The Nepali writing system misses many of these important features of Jirel, especially tone, and blurs other morphological processes. The research team decided that the ethnosemantic data were more important than the finer points of Jirel grammar, so local writing systems were used with local interpreters. For these reasons the data are to be considered preliminary.

The data were elicited in one of two general settings. The first was the Jiri Helminth Project Research Center. This site is a frequent meeting place for local people who visit to chat with friends or receive basic medical care. The consultants who were interviewed at the research station had stopped by in the course of a normal working day, often after they had heard of our interest in the collection of bird vocabulary. Each of these data collection sessions was conducted in public and usually attracted a crowd of people who were interested in the pictures and willing to contribute their knowledge to the discussions.

The second setting was in consultants' homes, several of which were visited because the research was being conducted during the primary millet-planting season. Many of the consultants were busy planting their fields and either could not, or did not, visit the research station. These sessions were similar to the public sessions in that they always engendered lively group discussion, but in these cases the discussions were between members of the family and not the general public.

The data elicitation processes and settings thus produced two classes of consultants. Primary consultants were those who were the focus of the data collection interviews. They were asked if they would contribute their time because they were well known in the community for having knowledge of the natural environment. Secondary consultants were those people who joined in the conversations about birds and contributed their opinions but their identities were not formally recognized in the field notes.

People in the community generally agreed that only older men would know about the names of birds in Jirel, because the Jirel language is quickly being replaced by Nepali and this knowledge is limited only to those who have had extensive life experience with the local animals. For example, one of the primary consultants has had experience serving as a local forest warden for the past several years; another two are brothers who have acted as local guides for trekking tourists in the region. In all, seven primary consultants contributed to the ethnosemantic data on birds. These consultants were all older men whose families included both children and grandchildren. When they were asked about their ages they were often vague and responded with their family status, that is, numbers of children and grandchildren. We estimated that they were in their sixties and seventies.

Avifauna Lexicon in Jirel

All of the primary and secondary consultants who reviewed, sorted, and named the stimulus package agreed that all of the pictures were kinds of *chyoyjungma* (birds). Two of the primary consultants mentioned that there were two *chyoyjungma* not included in the package. They claimed that they knew these but could not name them. Other consultants did not mention this, nor did any of them agree to include other flying creatures such as bats, moths, butterflies, etc., in the class of *chyoyjungma*.

Chyoyjungma is thus a primary lexeme, highly polytypic, and includes primary lexemes that are much less polytypic. On morphological grounds alone it is, therefore, a Life Form taxon of the creature folk taxonomy in Jirel. The other names elicited in the research are on either the Generic level or lower. This is typical of many folk taxonomies. For example, Brown (1979) identifies "bird" in his universal evolutionary sequence of creature Life Forms along with "fish", "snake", "wug" (worm and bug), and mammal-like animals.

The seven primary consultants varied in their responses to the two parts of the data elicitation activities. In the primary sorting/naming task one

consultant identified a little over twenty of the birds with eleven Jirel names, while another two consultants were able to name over one hundred. There was also some variation in the names provided for specific pictures. Sometimes consultants would use the Nepali name for the bird, while other consultants would respond with the Jirel name. Once all seven had completed the initial sorting/naming task, a master consensus list was developed. The accuracy of this list was checked with each of the seven consultants when differences were detected between their names and those of the other consultants.

Consultants differed in their names in one of two ways. Either a consultant did not recognize and name a bird while another consultant was able to provide a name, or the two consultants provided two different names. In this second case, either the names provided were in two different languages (i.e., Jirel and Nepali) or more rarely, the consultants gave differing Jirel words for the same bird. The cross-reference process resolved almost all of the disagreements, and the one or two that were not resolved were decided on the basis of majority opinion. This cross-checking provided a consensus list of sixty-six (66) names for birds in the Jirel language that refer to one hundred thirty-four (134) separate species identified in the more formal scientific biological taxonomy. These names are provided in Table-1, Jirel Names for Birds, along with the genus and species designation from taxonomic biology for each of the identified birds.

Most, but probably not all, of these Jirel names should be classified as Generics. The total of sixty or so Generics in the folk taxonomy is typical. In fact if the entire folk taxonomy often contains over five hundred Generic taxa (Berlin 1992), comprising perhaps a total of five Life Forms, then sixty would be rather sparse, but not unexpected. The number of binomials (two word names) is also consistent with typical folk taxonomies (see Table-2. Jirel Bird Name Binomials). It is not clear that any of these are Specific or Varietal taxa.

Table-1
Jirel Names for Birds

Jirel Name	Scientific Name
Bakulla	Bubulcus ibis, Anthropoides virgo, Egretta garzetta
Bwantete	Pomatorhinus erythrogenys
Chenchen	Pyrrhonorax phrrhonorax
Chenchero	Arborophila torqueola, Lerwa lerwa
Chhengchheng	Turdus albocinctus, Zoothera monticola
Chhilbak	Passer montanus,
Chilibili	Seicercus xanthoschistos, Serinus thibetanus, Phylloscopus reguloides, Phylloscopus inornatus, Phylloscopus proregulus, Cettia flavolivacea
Chirima	Carpodacus rhodopeplus, Anthus sylvanus
Chuchupe	Parus monticolus
Chui Hans	Aythya fuligula, Phalacrocorax carbo, Anas clypeata
Chyakura	Alectoris chukar
Chyankabire	Tesia castaneocoronata
Dambek	Alcedo atthis, Tringa ochropus, Capella gallinago, Tringa glareola, Tringa nebularia, Tringa hypoleucos
Damphu	Rhipidura albicollis
Chhyojungma	Lophophorus impejanus
Danken	Aethopyga gouldiae
Denchenachili	Tringa totanus
Denchenli	Streptopelia decaocto
Gadingma	Gypaetus barbatus, Torgos calvus, Pandion haliaetus
Gidda	Rhodonessa caryophyllacea
Hans	Vanellus cinereus
Honka	Ceryle rudis
Jalewa	Garrulax rufogularis
Jhyomuk Jodate	Garrulax ocellatus
Jhyomuk Leh	Actinodura nipalensis, Garrulax erythrocephalus
Jhyomuk	Phragamaticola aedon, Acrocephalus aedon, Cisticola juncidis
Jiglok	Phylloscopus reguloides
Jukurma	Treron sphenura
Jyoring	Cissa flavirostris
Kebarule	Carpodacus ruticilla, Carpodacus pulcherrimus, Carpodacus erythrinus, Pyrrhula erythrocephala
Khadak	Corvus splendens, Corvus macrorhynchos
Khokaling	Accipiter nisus, Circaetus gallicus,
Khrangmu	Garrulax striatus
Kifrekfrek	Monticola rufiventris, Phoenicurus frontalis

Kokale	<i>Dendrocitta formosae</i>
Kolumgma	<i>Mycerobas affinis</i> , <i>Megalaima virens</i>
Kukkuk	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>
Lamadui	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
Liklike	<i>Motacilla flava</i> , <i>Montacilla cinerea</i> (caspia)
Lunken	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
Momo	<i>Tragopan satyra</i>
Muste	<i>Pnoepyga albiventer</i>
Panpotok	<i>Bubo bubo</i>
Parewa	<i>Columba leuconota</i>
Petamu	<i>Zoothera mollissima</i>
Phenche	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i> , <i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
Phista	<i>Seicercus burkii</i> , <i>Seicercus castaniceps</i> , <i>Phylloscopus furcatus</i> , <i>Phylloscopus maculipennis</i> , <i>Carpodacus nipalensis</i> , <i>Dicaeum agile</i> , <i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i> , <i>Alcippe castaneiceps</i> , <i>Sylviparus modestus</i> , <i>Saroglossa spiloptera</i> , <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>
Pitakuli	<i>Yuhina gularis</i> , <i>Fulica atra</i>
Ponbotok	<i>Falco amurensis</i>
Quali	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Rolgimata	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i> , <i>Haliastur indus</i>
Rongi thunke	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Sarul	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Sikre	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
Suga	<i>Psittacula himalayana</i>
Suhie	<i>Minla strigula</i>
Sukudandan	<i>Cuculus poliocephalus</i>
Suyasuya	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i>
Tajungma	<i>Lanius tephronotus</i>
Tatire	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>
Tayamu	<i>Picus flavinucha</i> , <i>Picus squamatus</i> , <i>Picus canus</i> , <i>Certhia discolor</i> , <i>Blythipicus pyrrhotis</i> , <i>Hypopicus hyperythrus</i> , <i>Micropternus brachyurous</i>
Tha	<i>Falco peregrinus</i> , <i>Falco chicquera</i> , <i>Spizaetus nipalensis</i> , <i>Buteo hemilasius</i> , <i>Buteo buteo</i> , <i>Buteo rubinus</i> , <i>Milvus migrans</i> , <i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
Tha Jungma	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Tha Lemma	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Thunke	<i>Muscicapa superciliaris</i>
Toktokma	<i>Phoenicurus hodgsoni</i> , <i>Muscicapa sundara</i> , <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i> ,
Toktokma phista	<i>Muscicapa hyperythra</i> , <i>Saxicola ferrea</i> ,
Tonyotonyo	<i>Yuhina occipitalis</i> , <i>Yuhina flavicollis</i>
phista	
Tukruma	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>

True Specifics and Varietals must occur in contrast sets all of which are analyzable binomials that make reference to the next higher node in the taxonomy (Berlin 1990). However, this structure is not true of the Jirel bird binomial *Rongi thunke*. The “*rongi*” in this phrase refers to the altitude of the Jiri Valley but there are no other kinds of *thunke* with this taxon. Other binomials are also not found in such contrast sets. *Jhyomuk jodate* and *jhyomuk leh* are noun-adjective pairs. *Jodate* can be glossed as “big” and *leh*, from “*lekh*,” refers to an altitude between the snow cap of mountains “*himal*” and the local altitude of the Jiri valley “*rongi*,” although in reverse order. The consultants, however, identified three species that were merely *jhyomuk*; so these names would not fit in the strict intellectualist model as specific taxa. The same is true of *tha Jungma* and *tha Lemma*, as well as *toktokma phista* and *tonyotonyo phista*. It appears, therefore, that these binomials are neither Specific nor Varietal taxa.

Table-2
Jirel Bird Name Binomials

Jirel Name	Scientific Name
Jhyomuk Jodate	Garrulax ocellatus
Jhyomuk Leh	Actinodura nipalensis, Garrulax erythrocephalus
Rongi thunke	Copsychus saularis
Tha Jungma	Falco subbuteo
Tha Lemma	Aquila chrysaetos
Toktokma phista	Muscicapa hyperythra, Saxicola ferrea,
Tonyotonyo phista	Yuhina occipitalis, Yuhina flavicollis

In an effort to elicit the Specific and Varietal taxa consultants were asked to sort the pictures which they had named into groups. This procedure did not, in the end, provide evidence of these taxa, but it did prove useful. The failure came because the groups into which consultants sorted the pictures were almost always ecologically based. For example, one group of three primary consultants working together named a total of forty birds, which they then grouped by habitat, thirty-five were classified as forest birds, and the remaining five were water birds. Two primary consultants who named over one hundred birds, grouped these into thirty-one categories. These two consultants acknowledged that the thirty-one categories were not really different kinds of birds. Rather, they were just convenient groups that the two were using in order to understand the large array of pictures. These thirty-one groups, while not related to any sort of taxonomic hierarchy, did

represent, therefore, a rough approximation of how these two individuals conceptualized the universe of birds in Jirel culture. The result of this sorting task is given in Table-3.

Table-3
Sorting Task Results

Group	Birds
1	Pomatorhinus erythrogenys, Garrulax erythrocephalus, Garrulax rufogularis, Garrulax ocellatus, Zoothera mollissima
2	Garrulax striatus, Rhyacornis fuliginosus
3	Dicrurus leucophaeus, Dicrurus aeneus
4	Tringa ochropus, Tringa nebularia, Tringa glareola, Tringa hypoleucos, Tringa totanus, Capella gallinago
5	Dendrocitta formosae, Cissa flavirostris
6	Carpodacus erythrinus, Yuhina gularis
7	Zoothera monticola, Turdus albocinctus
8	Pericrocotus flammeus, Muscicapa superciliaris, Muscicapa sundara, Phylloscopus reguloides, Copsychus saularis, Phoenicurus hodgsoni
9	Alectoris chukar, Tragopan satyra, Arborophila torqueola, Lerwa lerwa, Lophophorus impejanus
10	Passer montanus
11	Gypaetus barbatus, Accipiter gentilis, Accipiter nisus, Hieraaetus pennatus, Pernis ptilorhynchus, Buteo rubinus, Buteo buteo, Buteo hemilasius, Milvus migrans, Haliastur indus, Pandion haliaetus, Falco peregrinus, Spizaetus nipalensis, Circaetus gallicus, Aquila chrysaetos, Torgos calvus, Falco subbuteo, Falco amurensis, Falco chicquera, Strix aluco, Bubo bubo
12	Corvus macrorhynchos, Corvus splendens
13	Psittacula himalayana
14	Acridotheres tristis
15	Lanius tephronotus
16	Saroglossa spiloptera, Cettia flavolivacea, Seicercus xanthoschistos, Phylloscopus reguloides, Phylloscopus furcatus, Pnoepyga albiventer, Alcippe castaneiceps, Rhipidura albicollis, Seicercus burkii, Seicercus castaniceps, Tesia castaneocoronata, Phylloscopus fuscatus, Cisticola juncidis, Phylloscopus inornatus, Phylloscopus maculipennis, Phylloscopus proregulus, Parus monticolus, Zosterops palpebrosa

- | | |
|----|---|
| 17 | Picus squamatus, Blythipicus pyrrhotis, Picus flavinucha, Hypopicus hyperythrus, Picus |
| 18 | canus, Micropternus brachyurous, Certhia discolor |
| 18 | Alcedo atthis, Ceryle rudis |
| 19 | Aythya fuligula, Anas clypeata, Rhodonessa caryophyllacea |
| 20 | Megalaima virens |
| 21 | Dicaeum agile, Aethopyga gouldiae, Dicaeum ignipectus |
| 22 | Chalcophaps indica, Streptopelia decaocto, Treron sphenura |
| 23 | Egretta garzetta, Bubulcus ibis |
| 24 | Actinodura nipalensis |
| 25 | Cuculus micropterus, Cuculus poliocephalus |
| 26 | Carpodacus nipalensis, Emberiza pusilla, Carpodacus pulcherrimus, Carpodacus rhodopeplus, Carpodacus ruticilla, Sylviaparvus modestus |
| 27 | Monticola rufiventris |
| 28 | Montacilla cinerea, Motacilla flava |
| 29 | Anthus sylvanus |
| 30 | Pyrrhocorax phrrhocorax |
| 31 | Acrocephalus aedon, Phragamaticola aedon |

When these grouping exercises failed to elicit Specific and Varietal taxa, one of the primary consultants was asked to describe each of the eleven birds for which he had given a name. It was hoped that this process would provide insight into some of the features that are encoded into the Jirel bird terminology, and in so doing indicate some of the cultural significance linked to these birds. His responses are summarized in Table-4, Selected Bird Descriptions.

In his responses, this particular consultant made use of features of altitude ("higher altitude" or "at this altitude"), habitat ("jungle," "home," "local"), and common foods eaten by the birds ("carrion," "chickens," "crops"), to describe this small set of birds.

At this point the researcher was presented with only a few Jirel binomials for birds, while at the same time the consultants were comfortable with further division of the entire set of birds. In fact consultants had volunteered further groupings of the stimulus set without prompting. On this basis it was decided to provide each consultant with features under which to group a representative set. After the consultants did this grouping they were asked if the groups were related to generic taxa in "kinds of" relationships.

The features used were derived from the descriptions summarized in Table-4 and the representative set was developed from the thirty-one groups

in Table-3. A set of forty-eight pictures was selected from these thirty-one groups. If a group contained only one example, for instance groups 13 and 14, that picture was included in the set, but for the larger groups (for example 11 and 16), several pictures were used. Groups of primary consultants were asked to sort the set on the basis of altitude, habitat, food, and nesting environment. Finally they were asked to do a free sort in which they could group the set into as many groups as they wanted on whatever basis they wished. The results of these sorting tasks are given in Table-5. Sort by Altitude, Table-6. Sort by Nesting Environment, Table-7. Sort by Food, and Table-8. Free Sort.

The sorting by altitude was relatively straightforward. The consultants easily classified the pictures into four named groups using Jirel phrases. Three of the group names, *lekh*, *rong* and *lekh rong*, used words from Jirel bird names and from the descriptions summarized in Table-4. The consultants, however, would not agree that these groupings had any "kind of" relationship to any bird name they knew. The same was true of the four groups in Table-6, except that the groupings were not as "natural." The consultants could not provide any Jirel word or phrase, except for the descriptive phrases given in the English glosses, unlike their ability to do so for the "altitude sorting" procedure in Table-5.

Table-4
Selected Bird Descriptions

Jirel Word	Description
Sarul	<i>Sarul</i> eats snakes. It is a good bird, a "home" bird in that it stays around the home and builds its nests of clay called " <i>chuchukuni</i> " in the nooks and crannies of the house. It is like pigeons, sparrows and other small birds in that it migrates in and out of the area by season.
Khadak	<i>Khadak</i> lives in the jungle and takes chicks and corn so farmers do not like them. Farmers will make a <i>torba</i> (scarecrow, dummy of a man with a hat and they put it in the field). Jirel people believe that if you hear <i>Khadak</i>'s sound in the morning you will get a message (good news) that day from the directions of the sound. <i>Khadak</i> is important in <i>Tihar</i>, the festival of lights. This four day celebration comes in the fall festival

spanning October and November during which large quantities of local alcoholic brews called *roxi* and *chang* are consumed. In it sisters honor their brothers and lights are put around the house. One day of the festival is known as *Kagtiha* (from Napali "*kag*" glossed "crow") on that day you worship "in the name of *khadak*" because the crow is not there.

Gidda

Gidda lives in the jungle and eats carrion (*richyobo* in Jirel). In Tibetan funerals people will dismember the corpse and offer it to *gidda*. There are two kinds of *gidda*, one that lives at high altitudes (Jirel *lekh*) and another smaller one that lives in the Jire region and eats chickens. Farmers do their best to scare this one away but nobody likes *gidda*.

Tha Jungma

Tha Jungma is not native to the Jire valley and is only rarely seen. When it is seen it is considered a bad omen.

Jyoring

Jyoring is a small bird with a big tail that eats corn. It lives near the home and is considered a good bird even though it eats crops.

Pitakuli

Pitakuli a very good jungle bird. There, in the jungle, is a plant called *thwasing* in Jirel that looks like corn but is poison to people. *Pitakuli* eats this plant.

Penche

Penche is a jungle bird.

Quali

Quali is a jungle bird but sometimes comes near the house and make a loud sound. It is a small nocturnal bird that eats in the jungle.

Parewa

Parewa stays around the house but raids both field and house for food. It is considered a very good bird and sacrificed for the goddess *Nidota*.

Suga

Suga is a parrot. It does not live in the Jiri valley but can be trained to talk.

Momo

Momo is a *lekh*, high altitude, bird.

Table-5
Sort by Altitude

Lekh (high altitude)

Tragopan satyra, Lerwa lerwa, Pyrrhocorax phrrhocorax, Garrulax erythrocephalus, Garrulax striatus, Garrulax ocellatus, Actinodura nipalensis

Lekh rong (between *lek* and *rong*, the level of the Jiri valley)

Falco peregrinus, Falco chicquera, Strix aluco, Blythipicus pyrrhotis, Megalaima virens, Picus canus, Corvus splendens, Cissa flavirostris

Rong (the level of the Jiri valley)

Capella gallinago, Treron sphenura, Columba leuconota, Cuculus micropterus, Lanius tephronotus, Acridotheres tristis, Dicrurus leucophaeus, Carpodacus rhodopeplus, Carpodacus ruticilla, Yuhina gularis, Muscicapa superciliaris, Muscicapa sundara, Rhipidura albicollis, Phylloscopus reguloides, Cisticola juncidis, Copsychus saularis, Phragamaticola aedon, Monticola rufiventris, Parus monticolus, Anthus sylvanus, Motacilla flava, Dicaeum ignipectus, Passer montanus, Zoothera monticola

Teral (the Nepali lowlands)

Anas clypeata, Egretta garzetta, Torgos calvus, Tringa nebularia, Psittacula himalayana

The sorting by food (Table-7) produced similar results. The consultants could provide no Jirel word or phrase that captured the groupings, and the groupings themselves were considered to be rather artificial. One consultant even said that the birds in the three groups really do not fit together, except by the accident of their diet.

Table-6
Sort by Nesting Environment

Nest in Jungle and Trees

Falco peregrinus, Falco chicquera, Tragopan satyra, Lerwa lerwa, Treron sphenura, Psittacula himalayana, Cuculus micropterus, Strix aluco, Blythipicus pyrrhotis, Megalaima virens, Picus canus, Lanius tephronotus, Dicrurus leucophaeus, Corvus splendens, Cissa flavirostris, Pyrrhocorax phrrhocorax, Carpodacus rhodopeplus, Carpodacus ruticilla, Garrulax erythrocephalus, Garrulax striatus, Actinodura nipalensis, Yuhina gularis, Muscicapa superciliaris, Rhipidura albicollis, Phylloscopus reguloides, Cisticola juncidis, Phragmaticola aedon, Monticola rufiventris, Zoothera monticola, Parus monticolus, Anthus sylvanus, Motacilla flava, Dicaeum ignipectus,

Nest Around Home

Columba leuconota, Acridotheres tristis, Copsychus saularis, Passer montanus

Nest in Cliffs and Rocks

Torgos calvus

Nest near Water

Anas clypeata, Egretta garzetta, Tringa nebularia, Capella gallinago

Table-7
Sort by Food

Do Not Eat Meat

Anas clypeata, Egretta garzetta, Tragopan satyra, Lerwa lerwa, Tringa nebularia, Capella gallinago, Treron sphenura, Psittacula himalayana, Blythipicus pyrrhotis, Megalaima virens, Picus canus, Lanius tephronotus, Dicrurus leucophaeus, Pyrrhocorax phrrhocorax, Garrulax erythrocephalus, Garrulax striatus, Garrulax ocellatus, Actinodura nipalensis, Yuhina gularis, Muscicapa sundara, Rhipidura albicollis, Phylloscopus reguloides, Cisticola juncidis, Phragmaticola aedon, Monticola rufiventris, Zoothera monticola, Parus monticolus, Anthus sylvanus, Motacilla flava, Dicaeum ignipectus

Eats Crops (Wheat and Corn)

Columba leuconota, *Carpodacus rhodopeplus*, *Carpodacus ruticilla*,
Passer montanus

Eats Meat

Falco peregrinus, *Torgos calvus*, *Falco chicquera*, *Cuculus micropterus*, *Strix aluco*, *Acridotheres tristis*, *Corvus splendens*,
Cissa flavirostris

The free sort worked much like the altitude sort. The consultants were able to give concise Jirel labels for the five groupings but did not agree that the groups themselves were "kinds of" birds. They identified four groups based on size and a fifth group of "water birds," but even this fifth grouping was not taxonomically related to any Jirel bird name.

Table-8
Free Sort

Tektekte (small)

Carpodacus rhodopeplus, *Carpodacus ruticilla*, *Yuhina gularis*,
Muscicapa superciliaris, *Muscicapa sundara*, *Rhipidura albicollis*,
Phylloscopus reguloides, *Cisticola juncidis*, *Copsychus saularis*,
Phragamaticola aedon, *Zoothera monticola*, *Parus monticolus*,
Anthus sylvanus, *Motacilla flava*, *Dicaeum ignipectus*, *Passer montanus*,

Adote

Lerwa lerwa, *Treron sphenura*, *Columba leuconota*, *Cuculus micropterus*, *Acridotheres tristis*, *Corvus splendens*, *Cissa flavirostris*

Ado Thikate (between *tektekte* and *adote*)

Psittacula himalayana, *Blythipicus pyrrhotis*, *Megalaima virens*,
Picus canus, *Lanius tephronotus*, *Dicurus leucophaeus*, *Pyrrhocorax phrrhocorax*,
Garrulax erythrocephalus, *Garrulax ocellatus*,
Actinodura nipalensis, *Monticola rufiventris*

Jodate (large)

Falco peregrinus, *Torgos calvus*, *Falco chicquera*, *Tragopan satyra*,
Strix aluco

Chula Khumkante (water birds)

Anas clypeata, *Egretta garzetta*, *Tringa nebularia*, *Capella gallinago*

Two of these three sorting tasks did seem relatively natural to the consultants, that is, it captured something salient about the Jirel organization of avian knowledge. They were comfortable with the sorting by altitude and the features used in their free sort, and they were able to name the grouping that resulted from the sorting task with one- or two-word phrases. The other two sorting features, habitat of nests and common foods, were apparently much less natural. The consultants noted that they could accomplish the sort, but that they thought it was more or less meaningless, and their descriptions were not expressed in concise language. Instead they were described in rather lengthy sentences. Finally, none of these sortings exposed any Jirel Specific or Varietal taxa.

Suggestions for Further Research

In many ways the domain of Jirel bird words offers no surprises in comparison to the general folk classification literature. The data elicited from Jirel-speaking consultants produced a Life Form Taxon in Jirel which corresponded to "bird" and there was a reasonable set of Generic Taxa for birds in Jirel. The data, however, did not reveal any clear taxa at the Specific or Varietal levels. While there are a few binomials in the data, they do not exhibit the linguistic structures necessary to be Specifics or Varietals in the strict intellectualist model. This is not to say that the sixty or so Generic taxa for birds are not sub-divided by Jirel speakers. Rather, that the sub divisions, as shown by the responses to sorting tasks, are more dynamic than would be expected in a typical taxonomic hierarchy structure.

The research conducted in the Jiri Valley in the summer of 1999, however, was too brief to be conclusive in this matter. Clearly, there are enough indications to justify further consideration of Jirel folk biological classification, but further study is needed to take the entire semantic domain of living things into consideration. The absence of Specific and Varietal taxa in the bird lexicon does not mean that such taxa would be missing from other parts of the biological classification system, such as mammalian animal, grass, or tree lexicons; and this research does not say much at all about the integration of folk biological knowledge into Jirel culture. Only further and more in-depth ethnography can answer these questions.

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A BRIEF REPORT OF SOME JIREL VOCABULARY

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Introduction

In an earlier era, when cognitive anthropology was narrowly focused on lexical semantics, one of its founding figures asked researchers to think of the enterprise not as getting words for things, rather as getting things for words, in other words describing the basic referential ranges of lexemes (Frake, 1969). Towards this end, a field dictionary of several hundred words, including information about how native Jirel's may organize them in their language was compiled during the course of fieldwork.

During The Jiri Valley Ethnographic Project, data were collected in four principle semantic domains: (1) kin terms, (2) objects and processes in the production of millet beer (*chang*) and its distillate (*raksi*), (3) macro-environmental zones, and (4) objects associated with the kitchen. A fifth domain is that associated with birds is discussed elsewhere in this volume (see Hamill et al., "Preliminary Ethnosemantics of the Avifauna Vocabulary in Jirel," in this volume). The most in-depth ethnosemantic information was collected on the bird domain. Other information, however was collected on the other four domains as fieldwork ensued.

Linguistic Background

Almost all scholars agree that Jirel is one of the languages included in the Sino-Tibetan language family. Beyond that, however, there is little agreement on the internal structure of that family, or on the place of specific dialects, including Jirel, in the family. There is common agreement among many scholars that Jirel is part of the Tibeto-Burman group that is equivalent with Karen in the Tibeto-Karen sub-family of Sino-Tibetan family (Benedict, 1972; Matisoff, 1978). Shafer (1940; 1955), however,

disagrees on its placement and questions whether it is a direct sub-family of Sino-Tibetan, or whether it belongs to a lower order class. Instead, he places Jirel, although not explicitly, in a Bodic division of Sino-Tibetan. In general, after reviewing the literature on Tibeto-Burman historical linguistics, it is difficult to disagree with Matisoff's position (1978: 1), that little is known about the interrelationships of the hundreds of Tibeto-Burman languages.

The placement of Jirel in these classifications is somewhat problematic because almost nothing has been published on the language. In this research we made extensive use of an unpublished Jirel-Nepali-English dictionary, which was compiled over the past several decades by Anita Maibaum and Ester Strahm of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. These two field linguists have published a few descriptions on limited aspects of Jirel, covering such aspect as the discourse rules (Maibaum, 1978), Jirel clauses (Strahm, 1975), and a word list (Maibaum and Strahm, 1973). No general descriptive grammar of the language is available. The placement of Jirel as Tibeto-Burman, or Bodic, is therefore based on descriptions of languages spoken by adjacent groups, such as the Sherpas (Glover, 1974).

Kinship Domain

The Jiri people are organized into twelve patrilineal clans and eleven sub-clans. These clans regulate marriage through extensions of the incest prohibition to all clan mates and first cousins without regard to clan membership. These clans, however, do not contain corporate lineages, and access to wealth and the means of production are individually owned. Here, we will report some of the lexical/semantic information collected with respect to kinship terms.

Table-1
Jirel Kin Terms and their Extensions

KIN TERM	EXTENSION
G+2 Gammu gammu chete gammu tikti goppo goppo chete goppo tikti G+1 ama ama tikti ama chete	MM, FM MMEZ, FMEZ MMYZ, FMYZ MF, FF MFEB, FFEB MFYB, FFYB M MYZ MEZ
adjing tikti adjing chete aba aba tikti aba chete ani tikti ani chete EGO'S OWN GENERATION noa adju adji noma G-1 pumo phujung	MYB MEB F FYB FEB FYZ FEZ YB; FEBYS, FEZYS, MEBYS, MYZYS, ETC. EB; FEBES, FEZES, MEBES, MYZES, ETC. EZ; FEBED, FEZED, MEBED, MYZED, ETC. YZ; FEBYD, FEZYD, MEBYD, MYZYD, ETC. D; EBD, YZD, ETC. S; YBS, EZS, ETC.

Consanguineal kin terms were collected as a necessary part of understanding the distribution of subsistence resources, prestige, and political power.

Consanguineal kin terms and their distributions were gathered on an etic grid (see Table 1. Jirel Kin Terms and their Extensions). These cover ego's own generation, the first and second ascending generations, and the first descending generations.

It can be seen that all Jirel kin terms carry meanings that distinguish sex, and in the first descending generation, sex is the primary distinguishing

feature in the two terms, *phujung* and *pumo*. Their meanings may be represented componentially as:

<i>phujung</i>	+K+M	<i>pumo</i>	+K-M
(K=kinsman, M=male).			

In ego's own generation, the feature of seniority, or relative age (+/- R) is introduced into the kin term system, and the four terms here may be seen as having the following componential definitions:

<i>noa</i>	+K+M-R	<i>adji</i>	+K-M-R
<i>adju</i>	+K+M-R	<i>noma</i>	+K-M+R

The ten kin terms used in the first ascending generation carry the heaviest semantic load. They require features of sex (+/-M), and relative age (+/-R), but they also distinguish the side of the family, and whether or not the kinsman is in ego's direct line.

<i>ama</i>	+K-M-P+L	<i>aba</i>	+K+M+P+L
<i>adjing chete</i>	+K+M-P-L+R	<i>aba chete</i>	+K+M+P-L+R
<i>adjing tikti</i>	+K+M-P-L-R	<i>aba tikti</i>	+K+M+P-L-R
<i>ama chete</i>	+K-M-P-L+R	<i>ani chete</i>	+K-M+P-L+R
<i>ama tikti</i>	+K-M-P-L-R	<i>ani tikti</i>	+K-M+P-L-R
(+/- P= patrilineality, +/-L = laterality).			

The second ascending generation maintains distinctions based on sex, lineality, and relative age but does not make distinctions based on side of family. It is possible to componentially represent these meanings as:

<i>gammu</i>	+K-M+L	<i>goppo</i>	+K+M+L
<i>gammu chete</i>	+K-M-L+R	<i>goppo chete</i>	+K+M-L+R
<i>gammu tikti</i>	+K-M-L-R	<i>goppo tikti</i>	+K+M-L-R

An analysis of the Jirel kinship terminology demonstrates the patrilineal basis of Jirel social organization, especially in the first ascending generation kin terms, as well as the theme of seniority. This cultural value is evident in other aspect of Jirel life. Inheritance is based on seniority, as is the relative prestige of various ethnic groups.

The Jirels consider themselves lower on the prestige scale than the Sunwars, Rais, and Limbus. According to one origin myth that these groups have in common, the Jirels were descendent from the youngest of

the five Kiranti princes. The other ethnic groups are believed to be the descendants of the elder brothers among the princes and are therefore higher on the prestige scale.

Millet Beer and its Distillate (*Chang* and *Raksi*) Domain

Chang and *raksi* are alcoholic beverages produced in the area. *Chang* is made from a millet mash that is allowed to ferment after roasting for a brief period, and *raksi* is distilled from the *chang*. Almost all of Jirel social life involves the consumption of *chang* or *raksi*, or if possible both of them. These two home-brewed alcoholic drinks are produced in virtually every household, and served under virtually any pretext. These drinks are as ubiquitous as are kin relations. The lexicons of kinship and *chang/raksi* are secondary to the social lives they contextualize. Although they are secondary, they are of significant importance in the lives of the Jirels.

These drinks are not unique to the Jirels. Commercially produced *raksi* is served in some of the better restaurants in Kathmandu, and one or the other of these alcoholic beverages are probably common to most, if not all, of the Nepali ethnic groups. These products occupy a place of some importance in the Jiri valley and virtually every family makes and serves them during almost every social occasion. For example, *chang* is brewed for important ritual events, such as funerals and marriages. For marriages a special *chang* is used that is made from the best ingredients, and only the strained and decanted liquid is used, without diluting it with water.

The Jirel people often list several feast days on which *chang* and *raksi* are consumed. These include, but are not limited to, *Dashain*, *Tihar*, *Mageshangrante*, and *Chite Dashain*. All of the Jirels we talked to, however, insisted that *chang* is appropriate almost any time; you do not necessarily need a festival to drink it.

Chang has some ritual significance, especially at one of the four days of the Hindu Festival of *Tihar*, or Autumn Festival, which is devoted to *Kaghi* (crow). *Tihar* also defines one of the few periods in which ritual requires abstinence from *chang*: on the "cow day" of *Tihar*, the Jirel people do not drink *chang*. On that day men have to perform *puja* and must abstain from drinking. They can, and do, drink as much *chang* as they want after the ritual duties are completed. *Chang* also has special significance in the clan god worship rites and in the *Phombo* curing rituals (see Sidky et al., "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," and "*Phombos*: A Look at Traditional Healers Among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume).

Chang and *raksi* are brewed in almost every home, and we saw no kitchen that did not include the specialized pots or other equipment

necessary for their production. Furthermore, families gain some prominence in the valley for the quality of drink they brew. For the most part, it is the women who make *chang*, and there are no larger inter-family *chang* making undertakings. It is one of the staples produced in the Jirel kitchen to be used in many social gatherings.

Given the obvious importance of *chang* and *raksi* production and consumption in Jirel culture, it is no surprise to find a specialized vocabulary that refers to the technologies and processes in their production.

The basic vocabulary in the *chang-raksi* making processes is relatively limited. It contains a few words that refer to the items that are involved in the production and reference to witchcraft (see Table-2. *Raksi* and *Chang* Vocabulary).

Table-2
Raksi and Chang Vocabulary

JIREL WORD	GLOSS
<i>karai</i>	a pan use to fry the millet.
<i>sa</i>	a roxi still
<i>dabi</i>	a long paddle like object used to stir and spread things.
<i>boksi</i> ,	a witch
<i>min</i>	yeast

Chang and *raksi* are made through a simple process that begins with sun-dried millet and ends with a blessing.

A Recipe for *Chang* and *Raksi*:

1. Dry the harvested millet in the sun.
2. Fry the dried millet in a *karai*
3. In a *sa*, boil water and add the fried millet to this, stir with a *dab*, keep heated until the water is gone; then cover the *sa*.
4. To cool spread the millet on a mat using a *dabi*.
5. Grind *min* to dust and spread it on the millet and mix; put the millet-*min* mixture in a basket; cover with a thick cloth and let stand for 2 days and 1 night.
6. With a piece of cloth set on fire using a piece of charcoal the millet is blessed with smoke to prevent spoilage which is caused by a *boksi*, or witch, (see Sidky et al., "*Phombos: A Look at Traditional Healers among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal*," in this volume).

7. Put the millet in a drum and ferment for about one month.
8. Squeeze the fermented mash through a cloth: the decanted liquid is *chang*.
9. The strained and decanted liquid may be diluted with water.

Chang may be further distilled into *raksi*. Interestingly, *raksi* has no corresponding ritual restrictions or uses, and it is commonly served to any guests at any time. It is often offered as a gift from the family of the groom to the bride's family prior to the marriage. *Raksi* has become a significant part of the cash economy, being sold at the markets, which have sprung up along the Lamosangu-Jiri Road (see Hamill et al., "Some Socio-cultural Consequences of Transportation Development in the Jiri Valley, Nepal," in this volume).

Raksi is made from *chang* through a simple process. The *chang* is distilled four of five times (counting marks are painted on the still after each step to keep track). When the drink reaches the desired alcohol content, it is bottled for immediate or future use, or for sale at the local market.

Macro-Environmental Domain

One of the recurring themes found to be significant in Jirel culture was their conceptualization of environmental zones. For example, the Jirel conceptualize the classification of birds in terms of altitude (see Hamill et al., "Preliminary Ethnosemantics of the Avifauna Vocabulary in Jirel," in this volume). Another example is that people describe their work in terms of where they conduct their subsistence activities, whether it is done in the fields, mountain slopes, valley floor, along the rivers, in the forests, etc. It is clear that the referential range of macro-environmental lexemes is extensive. The need for further in-depth work and analysis in this area is necessary to give us a better insight into how the Jirels understand and organize the world around them.

Table-3
Macro Environmental Zones

JIREL WORD	GLOSS
<i>himal</i>	mountain
<i>chyangma</i>	forest
<i>shing</i>	land
<i>khamba</i>	home
<i>chu</i>	water

Kitchen Domain (Objects used in the Kitchen)

In an analysis of Jirel living space it became apparent that the interior of a homestead and more specifically the kitchen area constituted an important cognitive domain. Consultants consistently evidenced a large vocabulary in labeling both space(s) and the utensils appropriately used there (see Table 4. Jirel Household Terms). A typical Jirel house is a single room building with a centrally located hearth, used for heat, illumination, cooking, and around which all social interactions take place. There is also a designated sleeping area, just as there is always a storage area. Additionally, some homes also have a *puja* room where clan god rites and ancestor worship ritual are performed.

Table 4
Jirel Household Terms

JIREL WORD	GLOSS
Spaces	
<i>kotha</i>	the kitchen area in the home
<i>thaap</i>	hearth area
Utensils	
<i>silauu</i>	mortar and pestal grinder
<i>derma</i>	metal plate upon which meals are served
<i>dabi</i>	a long stick used to stir or spread grains
<i>dekchi</i>	metal pot about the size of a saucepan w/out handle
<i>karai</i>	cooking pot shaped something like a wok
<i>odaan</i>	circular iron ring supported on three legs. the fire is built under the ring and the pots are put on it.
<i>lotta</i>	teapot
<i>daraj</i>	shelf
<i>chapati</i>	circular woven mat (about 70 cm. in diameter) that people sit on
<i>chhum</i>	large wooden cylinder (about 80 cm. high, 40 cm. outside diameter, 10 cm. inside diameter) used to pound grain such as rice, millet, corn, and wheat.
<i>chumbal</i>	the hammer that goes with the <i>chhum</i> . it is over 1.5 m long, about 8 cm. in diameter with an area of reduced diameter for the hands.
<i>deauri</i>	metal bowl used for baby food

<i>cha-cha</i>	spoon
<i>rangjung</i>	a conical basket like a <i>doko</i> but with closed weave used to carry fine grained material like millet (about 1M tall and 40 cm. in diameter at the top)
<i>doko</i>	conical basket like a <i>rangjung</i> but with open weave used to coarse grained material (about 1m. tall and 40 cm. in diameter at the top)
<i>namon</i>	the harness that goes with a <i>doko</i> or <i>rangjung</i> ; it fits over the forehead and around the basket
<i>khora</i>	metal bowl
<i>gari</i>	metal ewer
<i>saman</i>	utensils in general
<i>dodu</i>	ladle
<i>thumbal</i>	tubular object used to store salt
<i>tumlet</i>	canteen
<i>jarkeen</i>	plastic jug (perhaps borrowed from "jerry can")
<i>chhapani</i>	colander
<i>todum</i>	the woven part of a <i>roxi</i> still
<i>bata</i>	the brass part of a <i>roxi</i> still
<i>sa</i>	large metal pot (about 1 m. in diameter) used in brewing <i>chang</i>)
<i>dhibri</i>	tripod lamp
<i>kitti</i>	kettle (may be borrowed)
<i>thue</i>	knife (<i>khukuri</i> in Nepali)
<i>miling</i>	tightly woven rectangular basket used for drying grain

Suggestions for Further Research

As a beginning in understanding of Jirel cultural meanings, an in-depth investigation of all aspects their language is necessary. Such information could tell us, for example, how features such as relative age and sex merge with other aspects of Jirel culture. It could also give further insights into the articulation of kinship terminology with kin interaction and clan relationships. Similarly, an analysis of the *chang/raksi* lexicon and its interrelationship with kinship, religion, and a growing cash economy will contribute greatly to our understanding of Jirel culture. The in-home kitchen utensil lexicon is in contrast to the domains associated with the outside world, which we have partially described under the macro-environmental

domain. Further and much more detailed research must be done on the organization of these domains and their articulation within Jirel culture.

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SOME SOCIOCULTURAL CONSEQUENCES OF TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE JIRI VALLEY, NEPAL

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Introduction

The once isolated Jiri Valley of this hilly region of eastern Nepal came into prominence as a result of a Swiss developmental project. The Swiss Association for Technical Assistance (SATA) initiated a multipurpose development project in 1957 (Bista, 1980:70). At this time the Swiss government and His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HGM) began to expend a tremendous amount of effort in an attempt to develop the area, with such enterprises as the building of the Lamosangu-Jiri Road, agricultural development, health care, and education. The Swiss took the initiative in this effort and they supplied the funds and planning for the development projects (see Bajracharya et al., 1990). Interestingly, the Jirels as the indigenous population of the Jiri Valley were not given a role in determining priorities during the project implementation phase. The primary idea was that the Jirels would benefit along with everyone else in the area by participating in the local infrastructural development as laborers and lower level office workers, etc. While the Swiss project was in its initial stages, a major change took place in the political system of Nepal, from a multi-party system to the Panchyat system (see Joshi and Rose, 1966).

The project was based on the assumption that the creation of a new infrastructure and improvements in agricultural productivity would hasten the development process by raising income levels, which would in turn increase demand for non-agricultural products in the region (Bajracharya et al., 1990: 1). In this paper, we will examine the impact of the road construction and infrastructural developments on the Jirel culture. We will pay attention to issues of social organization, political structures, subsistence patterns, economic organization, and education.

SATA started with agricultural projects, constructing the necessary buildings and recruiting a local work force (Bista, 1980:70). In an attempt to improve health care, a hospital was built. In order to improve education a technical school was started. Moreover, to increase dairy production, the Jiri cheese factory was established (Bajracharya et al., 1990).

Social and Political Change

Prior to the onset of these infrastructural developments, Jirel marriages were arranged between clans with strict rules of clan exogamy and group endogamy. In fact, some clans engaged in complex patterns of reciprocity of marriage partners. The breaking of clan exogamy was and is still considered incest, while breaking group endogamy by marrying out of the Jirel group was stigmatized. Children resulting from such marriages were referred to derogatorily as *themsing*, or half-breeds.

The traditional Jirel marriage pattern of community endogamy and clan exogamy has weakened considerably, and the traditionally structured reciprocal clan-based marriage patterns are being replaced by marriage for the sake of socioeconomic upward mobility. A number of prominent Jirels have married members from other ethnic groups and their children have avoided the stigmatization of being called *themsing*.

These specific changes in traditional marriage patterns accompanied an even greater disruption of the community structure, which once was united by mutual interdependence. The reciprocal system of obligations has weakened as well. Also affected were the various forms of redistribution that occurred during numerous festivals, rituals, and life-cycle celebrations, in which context the wealthy shared their resources with those in need. While there were socioeconomic inequalities, usually in the amount of land one owned, it was often difficult to visibly distinguish the rich from the poor.

With economic development, came the notion of cash income, and materialistic motivations to accumulate cash and goods. Those who achieved economic advancement, moving up the economic ladder, were viewed as successes, while those who did not, were faulted for being failures. Thus, poverty was converted from a communal problem to an individual problem (Shrestha, 1997). An additional consequence of this was that the poor were excluded from participating in the development process. The wealthy could now pursue material advancement, relieved of the responsibility for the poor in the community.

This push toward individual values has also made its presence known in Jirel politics. Before development, Jirel politics focused on the group and internal disputes were dealt with at the clan level. There was essential autonomy from the central government. After economic development

efforts, however, new political affiliations, such as the Nepali Congress Party, the Communist Party, and the National Democrat Party, have supplanted much of the old clan-based political system. Thus the Jirel people are now organized along party lines rather than clan lines. Perhaps because of this change, the Jirels find it difficult to speak at the national political level as an ethnic group with their own group interest in mind.

Before the construction of the road, the Jirels had no say in the institutionalized Nepali politics at the local or national levels. Likewise, they were not able to impact the local political structure of the valley. Local politics was dominated by non-Jirels, especially Chhetri and Brahman castes. The situation has changed for the worse; while the Jirels are no better articulated to the national political system than they were previously, the national system now exerts more control over the valley. As a result, the Jirels have lost much of the autonomy they once enjoyed.

Subsistence and Economic Change

Jirel subsistence, prior to the completion of the road, was a mixed pattern, which relied on horticulture supplemented by pastoralism (i.e., animal husbandry). The major crops were potatoes, corn, or maize, and millet. Jirel animal husbandry involved cattle, buffalo, pigs, and goats. They also kept chickens. Clans held rights to the land used for both tillage and pasturage. The products of the system were distributed throughout Jirel society in a complex pattern of clan based reciprocal exchanges, which were carried out in religious rituals, marriages, and other social settings.

Since the road was built, all major aspects of Jirel subsistence patterns have changed. In the past twenty or so years, these changes involve concepts of ownership, crops and animals, and modes of distribution. The inventory of animals in the system has changed both with the introduction of new animals by the Swiss developmental team and the elimination of others. For example, a new breed of pig was introduced. The Jirel refer to their traditional breed as black pigs and the newly introduced breed as Swiss or pink pigs. Today no Jirels keep black pigs; thus the pink have totally replaced the black in the local economy.

One of the first things we noticed when we arrived in the Jiri valley was that there were no sheep. The area looked like potentially good sheep grazing land to us. When we asked the Jiri people about the sheep, they reported that they did keep sheep before the road came in but gave it up when the road was completed.

In pre-road times, the land that was not under cultivation was controlled by clans as common land. It was on these clan lands that the Jirel grazed their sheep. After the road was built, the central government of Nepal

asserted control over the clan held lands, which included the forests in the valley, and barred the Jirel's from using these areas for pasturage. The government of Nepal also instituted a change in land ownership, from clan control to individual tenure. There is plenty of land that is not under national control and open to pasturage, but is so steep that only goats can make use of it. This is why goats are still in the Jirel's larder. The road thus brought with it the loss of significant land resources and ability to manage large portions of land, as well as a change in animal herding practices.

On the other hand, the inventory and proportions of crops the Jirel grow has apparently changed little with the introduction of the SATA program. The major crops were and remain potatoes, corn (maize), millet, and wheat. A small amount of rice is cultivated in the lower elevations of the valley. The only change that the Jiri people report is a change away from the production of *chang*, a beer brewed from millet, to *raksi*, a distillate of *chang*.

This change in production reflects the cash market economy that emerged after the road was completed. Two local bazaars (market places) have emerged. One is called Dhunge Bazaar, and is located at the road's end. The other is called Haat Danda Bazaar and is situated a few kilometers to the west. The Jirel people now distill *raksi* for these markets and act as suppliers to the non-Jirel merchants (Sunwars, Sherpas, and Hindu castes) who control most of the shops in the bazaars. Because of the loss of significant land, the Jirels can no longer grow enough to provide for their subsistence for the entire year. They have instead been forced to enter into the cash economy of the bazaars, and they have done this with the wholesale *raksi* business. This also reflects a change in the mode of distribution from one based on reciprocity to one based on cash. The Jirels have, in many ways, been forced to trade sheep and self-sufficiency for poverty on the lowest level of the cash economy.

When the agriculture development program was started, its basic aim was the dissemination of new techniques for crop and livestock production and the introduction of new seed varieties (see Bajracharya et al., 1990). Yet the Jirels were not the beneficiaries of this knowledge. For example, Jirels produced no vegetables other than potatoes. Vegetables are imported from surrounding areas and are offered for sale at Haat Danda market every Saturday. The vendors are non-Jirels.

Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of trees, including fruit trees of various kinds (cf. Hocking, 1987), were distributed during the project period, our analysis show that there was no significant fruit production by the Jirels.

Prior to the loss of land that came with the road, goods and services were distributed among the Jirels in complex patterns of reciprocity. This has now given way to more emphasis on the cash economy. Public displays of these reciprocal obligations were evident in the various clan spirit festivals, life cycle rituals, and the co-operative exchange of labor at harvest time. These labor exchanges are still practiced, but the ritual aspects of clan reciprocity have declined. For example, at the frequent clan deity festivals, the host clan was responsible for assembling food, drink in the form of *chang* and *raksi*, and animals for sacrifice. They were responsible for distributing these and other goods at the ritual. These festivals are no longer being held because the food, drink, and animals must be purchased in the market with cash that few clans or individual have at their disposal.

The road did enable other ethnic groups to come to the valley and essentially gain economic control. All of the small businessmen from the village areas who had small shops along the old trail to the Everest Base Camp shifted their businesses to Jiri. When the Lamosangu-Jiri Road was built, it replaced the old trail, which went south of the Jiri Valley, as a way of getting to the Everest Base Camp. The flow of trekkers and tourists was thus diverted through the Jiri Valley, so all the small shop owners and people who operated businesses from Lamosangu onwards then migrated to Jiri. Consequently, the Brahmans, Chhetris, Newars and Sherpas largely controlled the development of the Dhunge Bazaar, which has become a large local market.

These merchants bought the land from the Jirels at very low prices. The Jirels were enticed to sell by the prospect of quick cash, and practically gave away the land. Now they realize their mistake and complain that the outsiders tricked them. The petty businessmen proceeded to open shops, lodges, and restaurants, and now they are the most powerful economic force in the area.

Hence, the road has not had any positive economic consequences as far as the Jirels are concerned. This is quite evident by the fact that only three Jirels have lodges in Dhunge Bazaar. The rest of the stores, lodges, and teashops belong to non-Jirels. The same situation is true of the Haat Danda Bazaar. Here only one store belongs to a Jirel. All the other shops belong to non-Jirels, who migrated to Haat Danda after the road was built.

The SATA cheese factory is still in operation and now belongs to the HMG. The milk obtained for cheese making comes from the Sherpas, who maintain herds of yaks at high altitudes, near Cherdhung Peak. The Sherpas and others control milk production; the Jirels do not keep Yaks. Thus the Jirels do not profit from the cheese factory and few can afford to buy the dairy goods produced there. Most of the cheese is exported to Kathmandu

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and very little of what is produced is consumed locally. The only direct benefit to the Jirels is that the cheese factory employs a few of them who earn cash wages. Jirels did get some jobs working for the Swiss or the Nepali government as laborers, but this did not have any lasting economic benefits since the total economy of the Jiri Valley was controlled by the Brahmins, Chhetris, Newars and Sherpas.

A major reason for the Jirels economic disadvantage was that many of them were fairly unsophisticated politically and not business minded. Moreover, the majority of them were not educated, in comparison with the outsiders, and those few who were left the valley in pursuit of better opportunities in Kathmandu and elsewhere and never came back.

Additionally, the Jirels were not able to capitalize on the benefits of tourism. This is because a few years after the road was built, HMG allowed airline operators to fly mountaineers and trekkers directly to the Everest Base Camp, thereby reducing the flow of tourists and cash along the Jiri road. In terms of the numbers of people who travel along the Jiri road no more than five percent are foreign tourists (Bajracharya et al., 1990: 50). What little cash flow associated with these visitors goes to the non-Jirel lodge-keepers and restaurant owners. Finally, as a result of this change, Jirels who were once employed as porters, carrying merchandise and equipment to the connecting districts and the Everest Base Camp, find these jobs no longer available.

Conclusions

Overall, the road has had a significant impact in the district as a whole. It has affected the flow of information as well as consumer goods, and it has also made access to Charikot, the district headquarters, much easier. It has stimulated immigration and has contributed to the diffusion of new values and ideologies. It has made the area more accessible for military purposes, both for the central government and insurgencies. Hence, the road has both integrated the district as a whole to the national government, and it has contributed to social, political, and economic changes in the lives of the people.

Prior to the road construction the Jirels did not participate in a cash economy to any great extent. Instead they relied on a barter system, exchanging one item for another. This was part of a larger system of communal reciprocity, which included both the exchange of goods, as well as helping one another during planting and harvest times. Planting and harvesting are still done in the traditional way. The whole community comes on a prearranged day to plant or cultivate the crops, and they do this

for free. The host provides food and *chang* (millet beer), and the work is done in a festive mood. People work, eat, drink, sing, and dance.

Since the road was constructed, a larger variety of consumer goods have become available in Jiri itself and it has made the Jirels less dependent on the community.

Involvement in the cash economy and consumerism has resulted in families competing with one another as they seek higher statuses, purchasing televisions, sending their children to boarding schools, etc. The road has not only brought in a cash economy, but has also increased the flow of western ideas, tastes, and preferences, and has fueled a new consumerism. This is one reason many people were quick to sell their land to non-Jirel migrant merchants. They were anxious to obtain hard currency and participate in the glamorous cash economy. Production is still based on a system of reciprocity, while consumption is based on a cash economy. This has considerably weakened community solidarity and cohesion among the clans. An effect of this may be seen in many of the clans having given up their traditional festivals, and the worship of their respective clan gods. Since consumption is now based on cash, it has become too expensive to hold such festivals anymore.

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HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE IN JIRI

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Introduction

Naramaya came from Kopche, a small village southeast of Jiri Valley, in eastern Nepal (Kopche village is part of the Chuchure Village Development Committee, Ward Number 7 of Ramechhap District). She was 35 years old, married with two children and due to give birth to a third child. Her labor pains started early one morning in January 1996, and her husband summoned the local *Suduni* (midwives). However, it appeared that the birth was a breach, i.e., somehow the baby lay side-wise inside the womb. At around 10 a.m., when the *Suduni* could not deliver the baby, local folks advised Naramaya's husband to take her to the Health Post in Thhose. This involved a two-hour steep climb by foot. Her husband carried her on his back in a *Doko* (a big basket made of straw). When he arrived at the Thhose Health Post with his two other children, he found the clinic closed, and no one was there except a "peon" (*piun*), an official term for a person who does menial tasks. The individual in charge of the hospital was out of town.

About noon, Naramaya's labor pains intensified and the baby's hand began to emerge from the vaginal cavity. Immediate surgery was required to save both infant and mother. At this time, her husband was told to go to the Jiri Hospital. Due to the lack of a motorable road, Naramaya would once again have to be carried in a *Doko*. Her husband arrived at the Jiri Hospital around 4:00 p.m., only to find the facility closed and no staff available. Desperate and tired, he was advised to take his wife to Kathmandu. With no bus service (two/three buses leave for Kathmandu in the morning every day), taxi or any other available transportation is not available, it would take him a few weeks to get to Kathmandu by foot, while carrying Naramaya on his back in a *Doko* (it takes five to seven days to get to Kathmandu for a normal healthy person). On learning that the Jiri Technical School owned two Toyota Land Cruisers, Naramaya's husband

went to the authorities and begged them to help transport his wife to Kathmandu. He promised to sell his land on return to pay for the cost of the trip. His pleas went unheeded. Naramaya died along with the unborn child the next morning around 4:30 a.m. Such incidents are not uncommon in Jiri and other rural areas of Nepal.

Health Care in Jiri: The Jiri Hospital

Jiri is located about 190 kilometers northeast of Kathmandu, nestled in a small valley at 7,000 feet above the sea level. The local inhabitants of Jiri, known as the Jirels, are the indigenous population of this valley, numbering about 3,500-4,000 people. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language and make a living by farming and herding animals. At present, Jiri has access to electricity and tap water. A few houses have radios and television sets as well (Williams-Blangero et al., 1998)

Historically, almost all health care was provided by indigenous folk healers (for detail information regarding the term "folk" see: Subedi, Andes and Subedi, 1995). In 1957, the Jiri Hospital was established through the combined efforts of the Governments of Switzerland and Nepal. The hospital was part of an enormous project that sought to develop the infrastructure of Jiri by furthering education, improving transportation (by building roads), water supply, agriculture, and the overall health care system. For all these endeavors, Nepal supplied land and manual labor, while the Swiss provided financial and technical resources.

Within three years of its inception as a health clinic in 1957, the Jiri Hospital expanded into a full-fledge regional healthcare facility with a 25-bed capacity. Facilities expanded to include pathology, laboratories, operating rooms, an X-ray machine, inpatient wards, an outpatient clinic, and physician and staff quarters. As a result of this expansion, people from rural communities all around Jiri and beyond came to seek treatment at the Jiri Hospital. According to Hospital records, the facility was fully staffed by competent Swiss and Nepali personnel, consisting of one Swiss surgeon, two Nepali physicians, three nurses, one auxiliary health worker and six custodians. These health care providers treated approximately 15,000 patients suffering from a wide range of illnesses, including Tuberculosis, each year. Patients in need of general treatment, as well as those requiring specialized care and surgery, no longer had to travel to Kathmandu. In fact, people from various urban areas, including Kathmandu, came to Jiri for treatment (Sharma, 1996).

The operation of the Jiri Hospital remained primarily the responsibility of the Swiss Government until 1975, when it was handed over to His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG). At this time, Nepal's government

was based on the Panchayat, or party-less system. A visit by the present King in the early 1980s considerably enhanced the reputation of the Jiri Hospital and elevated its status from a district hospital to a regional medical center. The Nepali government ran the Jiri Hospital efficiently for almost fifteen years. Hospital records indicate that it continued to operate successfully through 1988-89 fiscal year. On average approximately 10,000 patients were provided with health care services each year. By 1989, the hospital had expanded to include 30 patient beds, with a full time staff of 48 individuals (see Table1).

In 1988-89, there was a movement against the Panchayat system and it was replaced by the Multiparty system. The new political structure brought with it numerous problems. Due to constant infighting, competition, nepotism, and rampant corruption, no single party or individual was accountable for implementing policies and ensuring that they were carried out efficiently.

Under the new political system, regional hospitals were placed under the supervision of the district health authorities, who were more interested in maintaining their political power rather than in running the Jiri Hospital. Consequently, the daily operations of the Jiri Hospital were ignored. As a result of such neglect, the budget declined and so did the number of qualified health personnel. Those physicians and healthcare workers who were appointed to provide medical services abandoned their posts and went to live in Kathmandu, where they could enjoy the modern amenities.

Table 1
Number of Allocated and Vacant Staff Positions During the Panchayat and Multiparty System at The Jiri Hospital

	Panchayat System (1975-1989)		Multiparty System (1989-2000)	
	Allocated	Vacant	Allocated	Vacant
Physician	3	0	2	1
Health Assistant	0	0	1	0
Nurse	13	0	5	3
Lab Technician	2	0	2	2
X-Ray Technical	2	0	1	1
A. H. W. *	3	0	2	1
Administration	4	0	2	0
Peon	21	0	9	0
Total	48	0	24	8

Source: Jiri Hospital, Jiri, Dolakha. January, 2000

A.H.W.*= Auxiliary Health Workers

Since 1990, the government has changed hands frequently and the Jiri Hospital has continued to decline even further. The budget for the hospital has decreased and so has the number of physicians and other staff members. During the Panchayat period, 1.4 million rupees were allocated annually for the hospital, whereas since the advent of the Multiparty system, the annual budget for running the hospital dropped to a mere one million rupees. This decline is exacerbated by inflation and currency devaluation. As a result, the hospital staff has been cut in half, from 48 to 24 (see Table-1) and of the 24 allocated positions, 16 are staffed, while 8 remain vacant. Even these 16 filled positions reflect neglect by the political system. They are mainly non-technical positions. Eleven out of the 16 are either "peons" or administrators (see Table 1). Most of the time the physician and other technical staff are on leave or absent. Thus, incidents like the one involving Naramaya are not unusual at facilities such as the Jiri Hospital. Most district health posts and hospitals, even when in operation, remain ill equipped, ill staffed, ill funded, and often completely shut down (Subedi and Subedi, 1995).

Current Health Care in Jiri

As it stands today, the Jiri-Hospital is no longer able to adequately provide for the health care needs of the local people. With no physicians, few medical professionals, and a budget devoted to administration, providing health care seems to be low on its list of priorities. Due to inadequate funding, patients are themselves forced to purchase the necessary medicines, which few can afford. Also, because patients have to travel to the hospital on foot, they fail to seek help when they are either too ill to travel, and, like Naramaya, must be carried to the hospital in a *Doko* by a family member. Even for emergency situations no ambulance is available to carry patients to Kathmandu.

The Jirels suffer from a variety of ailments, mostly acute, that can easily be treated in most developed countries. Aside from the Jiri Hospital, Jirels have very little access to modern health care. Many local folks turn to the indigenous folk healers, who have been providing health care services to people from all over the Jiri region (for details refer to Williams-Blangero et al., 1995).

Recently, however, a small clinic providing basic modern health care services has been established privately. The Jiri Health Clinic, as it is known, was established in September, 1995 by a team of U.S. researchers who were in Jiri to conduct biomedical research. Appalled at the plight of the Jirels, the researchers along with two Nepali physicians from Kathmandu established this clinic which provides a variety of preventive and

curative services free of charge. In 1997, the team of researchers was able to organize a fund-raiser in the United States to help the Jiri Clinic. With the money, the "Naramaya Ambulance" was bought to serve the emergency travel needs of the local people.

According to clinic reports, as of December 1999, 35,000 patients have been treated in the Jiri Clinic, some of them with life-threatening conditions. The leading causes of diseases in Jiri are mainly gastrointestinal and respiratory in nature, followed by a number of other acute illnesses (see Table 2).

Table-2
Leading Diseases in Jiri Valley

Leading Disease System	Ratings	Leading Disease within the System
Gastrointestinal System Diseases	1	Diarrhea due to Protozoa
Respiratory System Diseases	2	Acute Respiratory
Skin Diseases	3	Non-infectious
Ear, Nose, and Throat Diseases	4	Pharyngitis
Musculoskeletal System Diseases	5	Backache
Accidents	6	Wounds
Ophthalmological Diseases	7	Acute Conjunctivitis
Nervous System Diseases	8	Headache
Abscesses	9	Acute Simple
Gynecological & Obstetrical Diseases	10	Pelvic Inflammatory
Genitourinary System Diseases	11	Urinary Tract Infection
Dental Diseases	12	Dental Carrier
Nutritional Deficiency Diseases	13	Protein Energy Malnutrition
Cardiovascular System Diseases	14	Hypertension
Psychiatric Disorders	15	Generalized Anxiety Disorder
Others	16	Non Specific Cough

Source: Jiri Helminth Project, Haat Danda, Jiri, Dolakha. 1999.

The free clinic depends upon donations made by the U.S. researchers and their families and friends, both in the United States and in Nepal. It seems that the time is not far away when the clinic will be forced to shut its doors

due to the fact that once the research project is over, the researchers will leave Jiri. With no financial assistance and no one to continue staffing and maintaining the Jiri Clinic, the health services available to Jirels will be in serious jeopardy.

Discussion

It is a well known fact that there is tremendous disparity in health status and health care delivery parameters between developed and developing countries in general (see Table 3). Within developing countries, health care is much more available in urban areas rather than rural areas. This rural-urban disparity has a concomitant negative effect on the health status of rural people. This is especially significant because most developing countries are comprised mainly of rural areas. This is certainly the case with Nepal (Subedi and Subedi, 1995; Subedi, Andes, and Subedi, 1995; Subedi and Subedi, 1993)).

Table-3
Illustrative Comparison of Developing and Developed
Societies on Health Care System Parameters

	Population Per:			
	Per Capita GNP (1995)	Hospital Bed (1996)	Physician (1996)	Nurse (1995)
Developing Societies				
Nepal	\$190.00	3,898	12,623	2,300
Honduras	\$600.00	900	1,586	1,300
Developed Societies				
United States	\$24,740.00	218	391	160
Japan	\$31,490.00	74	570	310

Source: Gallagher and Niroula (1995).

In short, even at present there is a dire shortage, if not total absence of trained physicians, other medical personnel, medicines, and equipment in rural hospitals and health posts in Nepal. According to Dixit (1999), in Nepal there is an average of six physicians per every 100,000 population. In rural areas, this ratio is probably 1: 100,000. He feels that given the current situation, it is unlikely that this ratio will change.

Subedi (1995) asserts that recent changes in the political system have exerted a devastating effect on the health care system of Nepal as a whole.

This is because major decision-making power lies in the hands of corrupt politicians, many of whom are elected due to factional support rather than on the basis of their education, expertise or ideas for societal development. This malignant growth of "politicalization" is evident everywhere and has led to a system-wide dysfunction.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the rural areas of Nepal, such as Jiri. The demise of the Jiri Hospital and the reasons for its demise are a clear indication of the present nature of the government. When getting elected and remaining in power exceeds all other concerns, one can expect that decisions and behaviors to improve social and economic conditions will be subordinate to the selfish agendas of corrupt politicians.

With no accountability and no checks and balances in place, the urban-rural disparity such as in health care continues to grow and become worse. The emphasis of the present Multiparty Government is to encourage profit-making enterprises, partially for the benefit of the elite, who share in the profits. Thus, within recent years, Nepal has seen the establishment of various private nursing homes (small hospitals), mainly in Kathmandu that cater exclusively to the needs of the rich and powerful. In addition, and four private medical schools have been established, where admission and success have more to do with one's ability to pay, than academic capabilities. Because money guarantees admission into these schools, children from elite families in other countries who are not qualified for admission into local medical schools are now seeking admission into these schools through heavy financial donations.

In short, it is through the efforts of some concerned folks such as those running the Jiri Clinic, and perhaps others elsewhere, that some health care is being provided to the rural Nepali population. However, with severe financial and other constraints it is evident that such provisions of health care are temporary. Unless drastic measures are undertaken to improve health services, thousands of Naramayas are destined to lose their precious lives in rural Nepal.

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MENTAL ILLNESS IN JIRI, NEPAL

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Introduction

The World Health Organization defines health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being," yet little effort has been devoted to mental health issues including assessments of the incidence and prevalence of disorders. There is, however, a growing recognition of the importance of mental health problems as part of the societal health burden (WHO, 1991). Estimates based on available data suggest that mental illness is present in developing societies in significant amounts and that mental illnesses impose substantial costs on those societies (World Bank, 1993). The mental well-being of individuals who live in developing societies is thus a matter of increasing interest and concern (Desjarlais et al., 1995).

Obtaining estimates of the incidence of psychiatric disorders in developing societies is not an easy task. Investigators note that Western definitions of disorder can be inconsistent with non-Western social and cultural meanings (Kleinman, 1986). Explanations for the origin of psychiatric disorder and their characteristics are culturally bound. Hence, even when disorders are measured across societies, a direct comparison of rates may not be meaningful. Also, there are very few community surveys in developing societies using acceptable measures of mental status and, hence, very little reliable knowledge about the extent of mental illness and disability in the community as a whole (Weissman et al., 1996).

The purpose of this paper is to report results from an assessment of psychiatric disorders among adults in Jiri, Nepal. We used a newly developed, survey-based technique to measure psychiatric disorders that can be applied to community-based surveys elsewhere. Thus, the Jiri survey represents the cutting-edge of research concerning issues related to mental health in developing societies. To address the problem of psychiatric illness in developing societies, it is most important to measure mental disorders in consistent and meaningful ways. Our research builds on previous assessment methodology while extending it to deal with their limitations.

Assessment of psychiatric illness across cultures has been facilitated by the development of such instruments as the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI). Indeed, this instrument reflects current American (DSM, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) and international classification (ICD, International Classification of Diseases) schemata. The CIDI has been validated across a number of societies (Wittchen et al., 1991). This validation has been conducted mostly among psychiatric and other types of patients in hospital and outpatient settings and consists of rates of agreement with other independent diagnostic assessments. The CIDI, however, is somewhat difficult to administer in community surveys.

Weissman et al. (1996) have carried out highly sophisticated assessments using the Diagnostic Interview Schedule (DIS) of large, well-sampled populations in a number of countries, but they do not include any developing societies in their surveys.

In this paper we report the results of an analysis of psychiatric symptom data collected in the form of a simple checklist for selected disorders (to be discussed in detail in the methods section). Checklists are much easier to administer and score and they minimize the length of time needed for the interview.

Data and Methods

Study Setting and Background

The Jirel are an ethnic group of about 4,200 individuals indigenous to the Jiri Valley of Eastern Nepal (Williams-Blangero et al., 1998). They speak a Tibeto-Burman language and are in general subsistence farmers whose domestic economy is based on agro-pastoral production. They are geographically concentrated in nine villages in the Jiri region of the Dolakha District, 190 kilometers east of the capital city of Kathmandu. The Jirel region consists of approximately 230 square kilometers bordered by two rivers, the Tamakoshi and Likhu Khola. The villages have access to electricity and tap water. A few houses have radios and television sets as well. As a group, the Jirels are somewhat aware of western ideas and modernization due to the influence of mass media and foreign tourists, mountaineers, and trekkers who often travel through the Jiri Valley on their way to the Mount Everest region.

Sampling

The main goal of the survey was to study adults who came from resident households of Jiri. Non-housed and non-Jirel individuals were excluded from this survey. Because the population of Jiri is highly stable, it was relatively easy to obtain an up-to-date list of residents. From a random list of 221 households with 1200 residents, the study selected all individuals 18

years of age and above (N=768). Interviews were conducted with 85 percent of these adults giving us a sample of 653 persons.

Three interviewers (one female and two males) were hired based on their academic qualifications (graduate degrees in social science), past research experience, and familiarity with the social, cultural, and behavioral conditions of the population for study. These interviewers were also trained in western research methods and interview techniques. Interviewers were required to do practice interviews to assure quality and accuracy. A female interviewer was assigned to a female respondent and a male interviewer to a male respondent.

The interviews were conducted through door-to-door visits by the interviewers. Each interview was scheduled for about an hour. The interviewers obtained demographic, economic and health behavior information, as well as physical and mental symptom data. Each item in the survey questionnaire was translated into Nepali and then re-translated into English to assure accuracy. Qualified translators who were well-versed in both languages did the translation. All the data for this study were collected between August, 1996 and May, 1998.

The mean age of the sample was 39.7 years (reflecting the sample of adults, only). The distribution is highly skewed toward younger adults, however. This reflects both shorter life expectancies and higher birthrates. Rates of marriage are high (76%) in comparison to Western societies, which suggests both the traditional value of marriage in agrarian societies and, indirectly, limitations on the role of women outside of the household. Western educational experience is very low. Only 31 percent of Jirel adults reported any years of Western education. Finally, incomes are very low. The average income is approximately \$51 per year (\$1 US = 68.5 Nepali Rupees). Demographically, these data are characteristic of an agrarian, limited money-based economy.

The Symptom Checklists

The *DSM-III-R Criteria Checklist* is a semi-structured diagnostic instrument that was designed for clinicians' assessment of the major DSM-III-R adult psychiatric disorders (Helzer and Janca, 1988). As a checklist, it is ideal for use in surveys, particularly compared to the DIS or CIDI described earlier. The checklist has been specifically compared to the CIDI and it has been found to produce good concordance of diagnoses (Janca, Robins, Bucholz, Early and Shayka, 1992). The checklist consists of a list of symptoms that are diagnostically indicative of each psychiatric/mental disorder. Scoring is done by counting symptoms and using a specified cut-off value to make a diagnosis.

The entire DSM-III-R checklist permits the diagnosis of 21 major disorders. Part of the complexity of administering the entire DIS or CIDI

comes from its comprehensive diagnostic scope. Hence, we focused on a subset of disorders that we expected to observe more frequently and/or which were theoretically relevant for our longer-term research objectives. The specific disorders we selected were: somatization disorder (screening criteria-7 items), generalized anxiety disorder (17 items), depression (7 items), mania (6 items), schizophrenia (8 items), and antisocial personality disorder (14 items). Some modifications of checklist items were necessary to make the checklist format more useable in the survey situation. Care was taken to insure that changes did not bias diagnostic standards and remained consistent with symptom content.

We also measured depressed mood as assessed by a twelve-item version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D) scale (Ross and Mirowsky, 1984).

Results: The Epidemiology of Mental Disorder

Table 1
Rates of Psychiatric Disorders in Jiri (Nepal) and the United States

Disorder	Jiri, (Nepal) ^a (N= 653)		United States			
			ECA		NCS	
		1 mo.	1 yr.	lifetime	1 yr.	lifetime
1. Somatization (ever) ^b Disorder (screen)	11.8%	—	—	11.5%	—	—
2. Generalized Anxiety Disorder (ever)	3.5%	—	3.76%	(4.14-6.59%)	—	5.1%
3. Depression (recent)	3.1%	2.2%	3.7%	—	—	10.3%
4. Mania (recent)	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	—	1.3%	—
5. Schizophrenia (recent)	1.4%	0.7%	1.0%	—	0.5% ^c	—
6. Antisocial Personality Disorder	0.2%	—	—	2.6%	—	3.5%

ECA = Epidemiological Catchment Area Study [DSM III] (Robins and Regier 1991; Reiger et al. 1988)

- NCS = National Comorbidity Survey [DSM-III-R] (Kessler et al. 1994)
- a = DSM-III-R Criteria Checklist (modified)
- b = time frame used in Jiri Survey
- c = includes diagnoses of schizophreniform disorder, schizoaffective disorder, delusional disorder, and atypical disorder

Table-1 shows the rates of psychiatric disorder as computed for the Jiri sample using the DSM-III-R Criteria Checklist and those found in previous studies of U.S. populations- the Epidemiological Catchment Area surveys (ECA)- and the National Comorbidity Study (NCS). The ECA surveys employed the Diagnostic Interview Survey (DIS) which is intended to be a survey analog to clinical assessment of DSM-III disorders. The NCS used the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) to assess DSM-III-R disorders.

The rates obtained from the checklist in Jiri are remarkably similar to those found in the US. It is not important for establishing validity that the rates be similar or identical but the similarities seem to suggest that the sets of symptoms may have common meaning in Jiri and the US.

It is possible that our estimate for somatization disorder is low. Kleinman (1986) and others have argued that somatization is more frequent in Asian cultures because these cultures do not "psychologize" symptoms. Hence, more physical symptoms of somatization will be reported. At the same time, in Nepal, the general health status of the population is much worse than in developed Western societies so that it might be difficult to separate the report of physical symptoms related to physical illness from those related to somatization. We chose a conservative approach to diagnosis in which respondents who indicated any likely physical illness on our modified Cornell Medical Index were not given a somatization diagnosis.

The rates for antisocial personality disorder and mania may not be reliable estimates. Our findings indicate that these disorders occur infrequently in the sample (0.2% for antisocial personality disorder and 0.6% for mania). A single individual qualified for the diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder and four persons met the criteria for a diagnosis of mania.

Table 2
Correlation Matrix of Psychological Disorders with
Sociodemographics

	Gender (Female=0; Male=1)	Age	Marital Status (Not Married=0)	Education (Western)	Income (Rupees)
1. Anxiety	-.058	.077*	-.109**	-.059	-.098*
2. Depression	-.029	.073	-.024	-.010	-.085*
3. Depressed Mood(CES-D)	.036	.217***	-.089*	-.056	-.059
4. Mania	.090*	-.065	-.056	.138***	.055
5. Antisocial	.409***	-.108	.086*	.279***	.029
6. Schizophrenia	.117***	.298***	-.071	-.057	-.049
7. Somatization	-.052	.135***	.064	.001	.024

*** $p \leq .001$ ** $p \leq .01$ * $p \leq .05$

Table-2 shows correlations between the indexed scores for mental symptoms and the sociodemographics of the sample. In the US surveys, being female is associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, somatization and depressive symptoms (CES-D), while being male is associated with higher rates of mania and anti-social personality. Data are unclear regarding gender differences in schizophrenia. In Nepal, being female is not related to higher rates of depression, anxiety, somatization or depression symptoms. Being male is, however, associated with mania and anti-social personality. Males are also more likely to report a higher number of schizophrenia symptoms.

In the US, anxiety symptoms, symptoms of mania, anti-social personality and schizophrenia decline with age, while age and depression show a curvilinear relationship such that depression is highest in the young and old. In Nepal, anxiety, schizophrenia and CES-D depression symptoms increase with age, while symptoms of anti-social personality and somatization decline with age. In the US, being unmarried is uniformly related to high symptom scores. In Nepal, being unmarried is related to higher rates of symptoms of anxiety and CES-D depression only. In the US low education and low income are consistently related to higher levels of mental symptoms. In Nepal, more western education is associated with

higher levels of mania and anti-social personality symptoms but education is unrelated to other psychiatric symptoms. Also, low income is related to higher levels of anxiety and depression, but not related to other sets of symptoms.

The results shown in Table-2 suggest that the social causes and distribution of psychiatric symptoms are somewhat different in the US and Nepal. The pattern of correlations is generally in agreement with findings from the US, but it is also clear that understanding the social origins of mental disorders in Nepal will require more specific investigation.

The Cultural Meaning of Mental Symptoms

The issue of whether symptom sets articulated in Western, developed societies represent salient symptom sets in non-western, developing societies can be partially addressed by asking members of developing societies about the meaning of those symptoms. One systematic method to identify the cognitive organization of a cultural domain (in this instance symptom sets in an illness domain), is to use a pile sort technique (Bernard, 1994).

Typically, pile sorts are done with cards or slips of paper. Each card has the name of a thing or concept on it, in this case the description of one diagnostic symptom identified earlier. Respondents are asked to "sort these cards into piles, putting things that are similar in the same pile" (Weller and Romney, 1988). A non-western culture might not contain the notion of "anxiety" but might view the symptoms that characterize anxiety as signs of having eaten the wrong foods or of being possessed by demons. Hence, the explanation for the etiology of a set of behaviors might differ across cultures, but the set of symptoms might be identical or very similar.

In the summer of 1998, two of our researchers recruited an independent, non-representative sample of 57 Nepali citizens from Kathmandu and Jiri to examine and sort the individual symptoms in the checklist into meaningful piles. Each symptom in the illness domain was written on a separate card and respondents were handed randomly ordered stacks of cards. They were requested to read through the stack of cards and then sort them into piles, so that items in each pile were more often associated with or might occur together in identifying an individual as being ill. An item-by-item similarity matrix was created from each individual's sort by tabulating the number of times each symptom was placed in the same pile with every other symptom in the set. The responses were subsequently analyzed using multi-dimensional scaling techniques to determine the way in which Nepali people understand the symptoms in the checklist.

The pile sort reveals that many of the symptoms contained in the checklist can be clustered in meaningful ways to describe conditions which are recognized in traditional Nepali culture. There is no complete overlap of symptoms related to Western diagnostic categories and symptoms related to Nepali terminology- except for antisocial personality disorder which is indicative of "bad karma" or of being a "bad" child in Nepal. In Nepal, both physical and mental illnesses are often explained in terms of possession by demons, witches, ghosts and gods (Stone, 1988). The specific type of spirit and their motives for possessing an individual affect the observable manifestations of the possession. For example, the set of symptoms that include indicators such as mind often goes blank, feel worthless or guilty, have trouble concentrating on things, think about death or suicide, and are easily distracted, reflect symptoms from the anxiety, depression and mania portions of the checklist, but, in Nepal they indicate possession by a demon (see Sidky et al., "*Phombos: A Look at Traditional Healers Among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal*," in this volume).

The symptom categories show both consistency with Western clusters and differences. There appear to be general analogs in Nepali culture for the types of Western disorders measured by our checklist. Individuals responding to the checklist items find most items in the checklist meaningful in terms of indigenous references. The factor analysis shows that the organization of these symptoms in Western terms is sufficiently similar (but not identical) to the way such symptoms are organized in Nepal such that the psychiatric categories would also have meaning in Nepal. The further implication is that the checklist provides meaningful profiles of mental disorder, which, although not exact reproductions of indigenous disorder, can be used to characterize the mental illness burden in this developing society.

Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to provide an epidemiological description of the rates of mental disorder in Jiri, Nepal, using a new survey-based measurement instrument. The checklist that we developed was used to estimate the prevalence of six specific disorders that were of theoretical interest to us. Respondents appeared able to understand the questions and the similarity of rates in Jiri and the US. This suggests that we may be measuring similar phenomenon in these two cultures. The factor analysis is generally supportive of our interpretation that the checklist measures distinctive disorders.

The differences between the patterns of correlation among socio-demographic characteristics and disorders in the US and Nepal are intriguing

and highlight the importance of using comparable instruments. The different correlation patterns suggest that the broad differences in social context between a highly developed urban society and a developing agricultural society can be used to examine the validity of general theories of the social causation of psychiatric/mental disorders. Indicators of status such as income, education and gender which are implicated as fundamental causes of disease in the US (Link and Phelan, 1995) do not appear to have similar roles in Nepal. On the other hand, gender inequality is much greater in Nepal than in the US and, while income inequality for the society as a whole is not as great, the contrast between a small wealthy class and the remainder of the society needs to be understood as it affects mental well-being.

The other reason why sociodemographic correlations might differ across societies is that the thing being measured (mental illness) differs across societies. To evaluate this possibility, we conducted a separate validation study using the pile sort technique in which Nepali informants self-classified symptoms according to their own cultural context and meanings. This exercise showed that many symptoms associated with mental illness are meaningful in Nepal as well as in the West. This is particularly true for symptoms of depression and anxiety. Although there is not complete overlap between diagnostic symptom categories or symptoms, we can argue that in Jiri, we measured meaningful symptoms of mental disorder.

In conclusion, there are substantial mental disorders that can be detected in developing countries. Although we only measure symptoms for some disorders, the data indicate that psychiatric disorders are frequent (about 12 % of respondents) even in this rural, traditional community. Our estimates of prevalence are conservative due to the limited number of disorders assessed.

The assertion that mental illness represents a significant portion of the disease burden in developing countries makes it important for researchers to determine the extent of illness and, ultimately, causal pathways. Such information is essential for policy making and to convince societies to expend resources to deal with these often-ignored health problems. The first step in obtaining such information is to establish some reliable and valid indicators of disorder that are culturally meaningful. We appear to have developed such a set of indicators. Our results in Jiri are meant to provide the sort of information that health planners need to have in order to provide effective health services related to the WHO definition of health. Our techniques ought to be effective in other villages, towns and cities in Nepal and in other developing societies, as well.

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JIRELS, JIRI, AND POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW

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Introduction

The Jirels are the indigenous population occupying the Jiri Valley in the Dolakha District of Eastern Nepal. The Jiri Valley falls within the jurisdiction of the Jiri Village Development Council (VDC), which is a geographic unit defined politically by the central government in Kathmandu. There are a number of other ethnolinguistic groups in the Jiri VDC as well, including Sherpas, Sunwars, Surels, Tamangs and a Hindu caste population, predominantly Chhetris and Brahmins (Bista, 1980).

According to the official Nepali Census of 1991, the total population of the VDC was 7,138. The Jirels constitute 3,067 people, or more than 40 percent of the population of the VDC. Despite this, historically they have had less influence in the local politics than many of the other ethnic groups. Furthermore, they are also on the lower rung of the socioeconomic hierarchy. Given this, the question might be asked: Why have the Jirels been unable to assume a more prominent role in local political, economic, and developmental activities?

The purpose of this paper is to describe the position of the Jirels within the local political structure and to determine some of the factors that continue to keep them at the bottom of the political and economic hierarchy.

Traditional Jirel Political Structure

Prior to the construction of a paved road that connected the Jiri Valley to Kathmandu, Jiri was a five-to-seven days walk from the seat of Nepali political power. The Jirel people were more or less isolated and left to their own devices. They had developed an indigenous political system based on clan reciprocity. Rules of clan exogamy and strong pressure toward group endogamy produced a pattern of marriage exchanges between clans that

involved a complicated structure of balanced reciprocity in spouse exchange and in ritually defined economic obligations (cf. Williams-Blangero, 1990). The clans were also required to perform periodic sacrifices to their various clan spirits. Members of other clans would also participate in these ritual occasions. These rituals produced a pattern of reciprocity and offered a context for intra-clan negotiations in which political decisions were made. These events also functioned to redistribute wealth because wealthy Jirel people were obliged to share their surplus resources with members of their community, whether or not, they were clan mates. Clan leaders functioned as arbitrators and decision-makers for their own descent groups, as well as settling disputes which developed between clans and sub-clans (cf. Shrestha, 1997: 79-81; Blaikie et al., 1980:235). (For a more detailed description of Jirel social organization, see Sidky et al., "Social Organization, Economy, and Kinship Among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume.)

Jirel clans were corporate in as much as each clan held communal rights in a land tenure system called *kipat* (M. Regmi, 1976). Individual families within the clan had rights to farm *kipat* land; but they had no rights to sell or otherwise alienate it from control by the clan leadership. These families had the right to keep all of the produce of the land, having been sanctioned to use it by the clan leadership. Thus, clans were the predominant political and economic force in the daily lives of the Jirel people.

This traditional political system was articulated to the national government through a system of taxes paid or collected in butter. The central government had appointed a single clan, the Serba, to serve as tax collectors, and this clan had become, in essence, the representative of the Monarchy in the valley. The Serba also represented the entirety of the valley to the central authority in Kathmandu. The Serba clan still today enjoys some prominence among the Jirels. This is well illustrated by the fact that one of the only Jirels elected to public office is from this clan. Additionally, one of the two men in the valley to have multiple wives is a member of this clan.

Jiri in the Panchayat Period

In 1961, the King of Nepal banned all political parties and instituted a new party-less political system known as the Panchayat. It was based on indigenous village councils whose aim was to build democracy from the grassroots up. Election to the National Panchayat, or Parliament, was indirect, proceeding through a hierarchy of village, district, and zone levels (D. R. Regmi, 1969; Rose et al., 1980; Profenberger, 1980; Joshi and Rose, 1966).

The Jiri Village Panchayat was divided into nine wards and each ward had its own chairman who was elected by the ward members. Until 1980, each ward chairman had the authority to select four individuals from his respective ward to serve as the representatives of the ward at the Village Panchayat. The Village Panchayat chairman and vice-chairman were voted into office in a general election in the Jiri Village Panchayat as a whole. After the third amendment of the Panchayat Constitution in 1980, a direct election on the basis of adult franchise for four ward members and one ward chairman was introduced (Maharjan, 1999). This was a significant change given that under this amendment, theoretically a greater number of Jirels could be elected into office to represent the Village Panchayat. The Jiri Panchayat, however, was continuously dominated by the Hindu castes. The chairman of the Jiri Village Panchayat, almost throughout the entire period, was always a Chhetri. Some Jirels were members of the village Panchayat, but the chairman was consistently of Hindu caste and he wielded superior decision making power.

In general, during the Panchayat regime, the Jirels as a whole had very little input into the Panchayat political system. In part this was due to their severe isolation from the national political scene as well as migration and limited social mobility. Furthermore, an extremely low literacy rate, lack of modern communications, language barriers, and limited knowledge of national and international events also played a part in preventing them from becoming aware of their political and socioeconomic situation.

Economic factors also appear to have had political ramifications for the Jirels. The bulk of the production in agriculture undertaken by Jirels had a primary objective to provide enough for their own consumption. Only a few wealthier Jirels employed some labor. They were not under pressure to develop their farms through investment of capital. Instead they were more inclined to use the surplus generated to advance their own socioeconomic situations. Those with little or no land worked as laborers providing services for a fixed monthly payment. Until quite recently, minute proportions of these farmers were involved in some form of outside employment and this has had important political consequences.

While it is true that the Jirels may have benefited from working for the Panchayat Talim Kendra (training center), the Swiss-built Jiri Hospital, and the Nepali government, these jobs, however, were lower level and low paid positions. With Swiss development activities, education was made available to Jirels because of the central government's emphasis on education. Government-funded public primary schools were established, giving the Jirels access to at least four years of education. Subsequently, secondary schools and high schools were established. Thus, a number of the Jirels

gained some literacy in Nepali and English. Many saw the importance of education and consequently today there are 14 institutions of learning, both governmental and private in the Jiri Valley. During the Panchayat period, a handful of Jirels, including one woman, did achieve higher education, becoming physicians and engineers. But these individuals, who benefited from the initial economic development efforts in Jiri, left the valley to enhance their own careers. Consequently, they did not make any contribution to the uplifting of their group's political and/or economic status. Hence, the Jirels remained at the lower rungs of the socio-political and economic hierarchy of Jiri and weakened their indigenous political structure.

In general, it appears that the Jirels failed to recognize the political changes taking place around them and could not take advantage of any of the significant opportunities that had evolved during the Swiss-initiated development activities. Their failure to take advantage of these opportunities led to further disenfranchisement. Nevertheless, economic development and access to education did have some positive effect on their political consciousness, as evidenced during both the last local election of the Panchayat regime (1986/87), and elections under the Multiparty system.

However, despite their relative socio-political and economic powerlessness during the Panchayat regime, the Jirel community itself, relatively isolated as it was, still had considerable group solidarity and cohesion. Based on interviews with numerous clan elders, our study revealed that clan leadership held sway, clan leaders still wielded a degree of political authority, and the clans were still following their traditional interrelationships based upon reciprocity. There were a few marriages outside the Jirel clans, but their cultural traditions, clan rituals, and clan structure remained firmly intact. Today, however, all of this has changed. Out-marriage is preferred, if not common; clan leadership has neither authority nor access to resources, clan cohesion has begun to crumble, and clans are no longer responsible for important community rituals.

This phenomenon can be understood, in part, by the macro-political structure of the nation during Panchayat regime. For example, one of the key factors that kept all of Nepal's 75 diverse ethnic groups together was the king himself. Respecting and obeying the King was regarded as part of one's moral duty, a precept deriving from the Hindu belief that the King is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu (the Hindu god of prosperity). Showing dissatisfaction or disrespect to the "Crown" was viewed as a moral failure. As a result, the vast majority of the people, in general, had great faith and respect for the king and accepted the Panchayat political system. At a micro-level, the same cultural pattern of respect for clan elders seemed to hold true

amongst the Jirels. Although the Jirels are Buddhists, for centuries they have been highly influenced by Hindu beliefs and practices. For example, historically, Jirels, while professing Buddhism, have celebrated all the major Hindu religious rituals and festivals, such as *Maghe Sangkranti*, *Saune Sangkranti*, *Chaite Dasain*, *Dasami Tika (Dasain)*, *Bhai Tika (Tihar)*. Thus it is reasonable to expect that the idea of filial piety continued to be dominant among the Jirels. This traditional and pervasive cultural pattern accounts for the cohesiveness and group solidarity during this period.

Despite the domination and exploitation of this Hindu caste for decades, the cohesiveness and solidarity among the Jirel clans, and the 1980 constitutional amendment noted above, enabled the Jirels to elect, for the first time in the history of the Panchayat, one of their own to the office of chairman of the Village Panchayat. Unfortunately, this occurred towards the end of the Panchayat era in 1986-1987. Prior to this no Jirel was ever elected into any major offices at the local, district, or national levels. It could be argued that the 1980 constitutional amendment was a landmark, along with the development activities, that promised to uplifted the Jirels politically and economically. But the changes in the political system did not allow this to come to fruition.

Post-Multiparty Period

The Panchayat system changed to the Multiparty system in April, 1990. The demise of the Panchayat system was the result of a so-called revolution which had been initiated through the combined efforts of all the leaders of the previously banned political parties, the urban elite, and students, all of whom had perceived the government as undemocratic because of the "party-less characteristics" of the system.

Nationally, it meant a constitutional monarchy, with people now running for office under their respective party banners. Various parties became active throughout Nepal; the major parties included the Nepali Congress Party, the Communist Party, and the National Democratic Party. The Office of the Election Commission during the 1991 elections (Maharjan, 1999), however, officially recognized forty-three parties. In the Jiri Valley, the Communist and the Nepali Congress Parties have been by far the most visible and active. In part, this may be because, with the wave of so-called democracy sweeping the nation, those sympathetic to the Panchayat system, who were labeled a part of the old guard, felt themselves to be under the threat of persecution. Members of the Panchayat regime, however, were able to constitute themselves into parties and won four seats of the 205 seats of the House of Representative in the first national election. Although they have since gained greater popularity and strength

elsewhere, they have been unable to gain a foothold in the Jiri Valley. As a consequence, the inhabitants of the Jiri Valley began to identify themselves either with the Communist or the Nepali Congress Party. The traditional community-based Jirels now find themselves confronted with, and divided between, two new alien political ideologies.

Village Development Council/Committee

Under the new system, the Jiri Valley is a part of the Jiri Village Development Council, a local level political unit. In Nepal, all such political units are divided into nine wards. The Council itself nominates two individuals as members, one of whom must be a woman. All eligible members within that political unit (men and women, 21 years old and older) elect the chairman and vice-chairman of the Council. The Council contains within it a committee, known as the Village Development Committee (VDC). This committee is composed of the chairman and vice-chairman of the council, the chairmen of the nine wards and two members, including one woman nominated by the Council. The chairman, vice-chairman, and one individual elected by the VDC, are automatically members of the District Development Council and Committee at the district level (Maharjan, 1998).

An examination of the results of the first election, which took place in 1992, gives insight into the internal political dynamics of Jiri VDC. In this election, the total eligible voters of the VDC directly elected the chairman and vice-chairman. On the other hand, voters of their respective wards elected the nine ward chairmen. Of these eleven people, eight were Jirels and three were non-Jirels. These elected officials then appointed 36 individuals as ward members from the nine wards respectively; of these, 26 were Jirels. They appointed 11 other members from the village, all of whom respected or distinguished members of the village; hence, the total membership of the Village Council totaled 58. Of these positions, Jirels occupied 34, and 24 were occupied by Newars, Chhetris, Biswokarma (a Hindu caste considered untouchable by the upper castes), and Sherpas.

As a result of this election, eleven elected members, close to 90% were Jirels, and 59% of the people appointed from the wards were also Jirels. Furthermore, the elected chairman and the vice-chairman were Jirels. Therefore, for the first time in the history of Jiri Valley, the Jirels dominated the institutionalized local political scene. Thus, the Multiparty system gave the Jirels a chance to become a key factor in the VDC politics and the opportunity to increase and strengthen their political power.

In the 1997 election, the direct election of ward member representatives was introduced with the stipulation that each ward elects at least one woman representative. During this election, the voters elected a Sherpa as chairman

and the vice-chairman was a Jirel. Of the 11 committee members, 90% were still Jirels. This committee appointed two officials, one of whom was a woman. Of these 13 individuals, elected and appointed, 10 were Jirels. On the council level 36 ward representatives were now elected, rather than appointed. Four were from each ward and an additional six individuals were appointed by the council of 36. Thus the total membership of VDC was 55; of these 32 were Jirels and 23 were non-Jirels.

It may be noted that the Jirels still retained the majority in the VDC; however, the chairman was replaced by a non-Jirel. Why did the Jirels elect a Sherpa instead of one of their own? In order to answer this question we must look at Jirel history.

Throughout their known history, the Jirels have been subjugated and exploited by the local Hindu caste elites. It was these elites who established themselves in the eastern hills of Nepal and the Jiri Valley systematically taking *kipat* lands in exchange for money lending services (Regmi, 1976:95; Rose and Scholz, 1980:20). With the means of production in the hands of these upper castes, the Jirels and other ethnic groups became subservient and were subjected to considerable exploitation throughout the Panchayat system, while the Hindus were in charge.

This is not to say that the Jirels were not a cohesive group unable to take advantage of political opportunities. In fact, we have seen how they seized the first chance they got after the 1980 constitutional amendment, demonstrating that they could function as a cohesive political unit. They demonstrated the same capacity in the 1992 election, which occurred with the introduction of the Multiparty system. Once again, a Jirel assumed the office of Jiri VDC. However, the Jirel were in the midst of the economic development that impacted their social, economic, and political environment. This transition to a cash economy that eroded the traditional communal-based reciprocal economic exchange system, must also be taken into consideration.

This transition was accompanied the arrival of party ideology. Together, these two forces literally tore up the social fabric of the Jirel community and divided it along political and economic lines. Now the Jirels' allegiance is towards party and dogma rather than filial piety organized around community, clan, or family, and Jirel values emphasize individual success, rather than ethnic solidarity.

As is true throughout Nepal, there is no relationship between ability or competence and political power. As Subedi has (1995:1) pointed out "the accession of political power is more of a function of attaining a popular support based on individual personality and party ticket rather than support of policies/ideas of a party for societal development. An individual's

identification with a party has become a substitute for the more traditional [ethnic identity]. " While it is true that the Jirels have been exploited by other interest groups, one must not forget that most Jirel political leaders are educated and some are quite capable of maneuvering in the political arena. Instead of trying to develop their community they have pursued their own political and socio-economic interests and have in fact become "clones" of the Hindu caste. For this reason, the first VDC under a Jirel Chairman was unable to accomplish anything because everyone had their own political agendas, rather than a concern for Jirel welfare.

The depth of this rift in the Jiri community became evident in the 1997 election, when a majority of the Jirels voted for a Sherpa for the Chairmanship rather than one of their own. There are in fact widespread rumors that a certain wealthy Jirel man spent no less than 50,000 rupees (by no means of small sum in Jiri), in order to undermine the incumbent Jirel VDC chairman.

Conclusion

All this suggests that the Jirels are manipulated by various interest groups, each with their own agenda and an unstated policy of divide and rule. In following party politics without a clear understanding of its implications, and the pursuit of individual status, based on a cash economy, the Jirels are losing their ethnic solidarity, cohesiveness, and ethnicity.

If this trend continues, we believe that the Jirels will not only regress to their previous subordinate position, but they will also lose all prospects of ever improving their political and economic positions. They are playing in a game in which the cards are already stacked against them. Only if they come together as a community with common goals, and shed their dogmas for genuine concern for their community will they have a chance to win or at least improve their conditions.

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